Collected
Essays and
Lectures

Romila Thapar

The Historian and Her Craft

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Religion and Society

In conversation with
Kunal Chakrabarti

The Historian and Her Craft

THE HISTORIAN AND HER CRAFT

Collected Essays and Lectures

Romila Thapar

Volume IV: Religion and Society

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Contents

List of Abbreviations vii

Introduction ix
Kunal Chakrabarti

EXPLORING NEW IDEAS

1. Sacrifice, Surplus, and the Soul 1
2. Ideology, Society and the Upaniṣads 23
3. Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millennium BC in Northern India 45
4. The Oral and the Written in Early India 64

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE RENOUNCER

5. Dissent and Protest in the Early Indian Tradition 81
6. Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-Culture? 102
7. The Householder and the Renouncer in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Traditions 138
8. Millenarianism and Religion in Early India 168

INCLUSION AND EXILE

9. The *Purāṇas*: Heresy and the *Vaṃśānucarita* 184
10. Exile and the Kingdom: Some Thoughts on the '*Rāmāyaṇa*' 205
11. Perceiving the Forest: Early India 242

RELIGION AS AN ASPECT OF POLITICS

12. Syndicated Hinduism 262

FORMS OF PATRONAGE—OLD AND NEW

13. Cultural Transaction and Early India: Tradition and Patronage 290
14. Patronage and the Community 324
15. The Museum and History 344
16. The Museum Experience 360

Romila Thapar *in Conversation with* Kunal Chakrabarti 372
Index 411

Abbreviations

ASWI	*Archaeological Survey of Western India*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Africa Studies*
Ep. Ind.	*Epigraphia Indica*
JOI	*Journal of the Oriental Institute*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
PIHC	*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*

Introduction

Kunal Chakrabarti

Romila Thapar has always resisted ideological labels. However, the emphasis in her work on the significance of the material basis for an understanding of ideas and practices and her method of selecting and interpreting historical data have made her readers believe that, despite her individuality, she belongs to the broad Left–liberal category of historians. Left historians of India, barring a few exceptions, did not engage with history of religions per se. They have dealt with ideologies that legitimize power, which were almost invariably religious in premodern times, but seldom with the sets of beliefs and practices that constitute the realm of the sacred. This is not true of Thapar. The sixteen essays in this volume address issues related to religious life in early India in a variety of ways and cover an amazing range of themes. These include topics as diverse as sacrifice and renunciation, exile and the forest, patronage and community, and cultural transactions and the museum. And Thapar pays equal attention to both the Brahmanic and Shramanic traditions, the two dominant religious belief systems of ancient India.

Not only are the themes diverse, but they have also been analysed from multiple points of view, engendered by the conviction that religion is not an isolated domain but forms an integral part of the complex web of social, economic, and political relations. In a rare moment of departure from her usual reticence in talking about history of religions in general terms, Thapar once wrote that there has been a tendency to view the role of religion in the Indian tradition from a limited perspective. Discussion has centred on philosophical intricacies and the universe of icons and symbols. Too little attention has been given to the men and women who were the creators, the audience, and the perpetuators of religious cults, sects, and organizations. If doctrines and tenets changed, it was because human requirements as well as the forms of dominant interests changed. Thapar, therefore, suggests that 'religious expression in itself has to be analysed from a multiple perspective since it performs many functions other than the solely religious' ('Dissent and Protest in Early Indian Tradition', chapter 5 of this volume). This has remained the guiding principle of all that she has written on the religious traditions of early India.

In this Introduction, I will look at two of these themes that have persistently engaged Thapar's attention—the Vedic sacrificial ritual, and renunciation and the social context. They also exemplify the multiple perspectives through which she has attempted to unravel the historical import of each of these themes.

* * *

Somewhat unconventionally, Thapar approaches the world of Vedic sacrifices through the *Upaniṣad*s, the earliest recorded discourses on theories of the immortality of the soul ('Sacrifice, Surplus, and the Soul', chapter 1 of this volume). She argues that texts with such specific concerns are 'anchored in points of time that give them a historical dimension'. Although the *Upaniṣad*s are primarily philosophical texts, they are embedded in the society and represent a process of formation of an ideology. Ideology holds together a social order and ideas are often used to legitimize that particular order. Thapar does not posit a simplistic correlation between ideology and society but insists that 'ideologies are not history-free'. In the complexities associated with Upanishadic and consequent ideas, which marked a watershed between the older Vedic corpus and the new ideologies such as Buddhism, some earlier features were transformed and some others were conceived in response to contemporary requirements. In investigating this transformation, Thapar reminds us that 'the historian's primary concern is why this change occurred'.

The *Upaniṣad*s sought enlightenment of the human condition and thus represented a change in the paradigm of knowledge. They broke away from Vedic ritualism and seemed to be 'a rationalizing movement'. The new doctrine addressed issues concerning the immortality of the soul, rebirth and retribution, and the realization of the self. It conceived of the possibility of a reality beyond our immediate senses that could be accessed only through new techniques of perception, such as meditation and ascetic practices. The *Upaniṣads* were concerned with the individual who aspired for immortality through liberation from the cycle of repeated births and deaths or *mokṣa*. The new doctrine distanced itself from sacrificial rituals and drew on mystic concepts.

Thapar then delineates the nature and function of sacrifice in Vedic society. A ritual act is fundamentally different from the mundane one. Yet it has a social aspect as it involves participation of a performer and a priest. The sacrificial ritual was a network of exchange of resources between the god, the priest, and the *kṣatriya*. In a society that consisted of small, competitive groups, this was an occasion for underscoring status, wealth, and power.

Over a period, many new trends became visible. The primary economic activity changed from cattle herding to agriculture. The *kṣatriya* settled new lands and encouraged their cultivation. He received prestations from his clansmen and others who were engaged in agriculture. While this augmented the wealth of the *kṣatriya*, the custom of naming territories after the *kṣatriya* ruling clan enhanced his political authority. Prestations were made during the performance of sacrificial rituals, which were also occasions for display, consumption, and destruction of wealth. This added to the status of the performer but depleted his treasury.

Agriculture required regular availability of labour, which was organized through the imposition of the *varṇa* hierarchy on society. Ownership of land began to pass from clans to families. In the middle Ganga region, marshlands and forests were cleared for settlement, assisted by new iron tools. The number and size of settlements increased, some of which gradually developed into urban centres. Wet rice cultivation led to larger yields. The *kṣatriya*, as ruler, received a share of the produce, which eventually grew into taxes. These trends contributed to the accumulation of wealth, which provided the resource for the emergence of kingdoms. Hence, the destruction of wealth at the sacrificial ritual became a drag on the system.

After this detour into the material backdrop, Thapar returns to the question of why the *kṣatriya* explored the doctrines that came to be included in the *Upaniṣads*. She argues that philosophical curiosity, coupled with the need to relinquish a religious practice that demanded unproductive consumption of wealth, led to the move away from the sacrificial ritual. Thapar says that the wealth thus preserved helped to sustain a state system and added to the power of the *kṣatriya*. The *kṣatriya* no longer required the mediation of the *brāhmaṇa* as power was now largely determined by access to resources. The sacrificial ritual thus became both unprofitable and redundant. It, therefore, became necessary to explore new ways of relating to the divine.

The new doctrine was primarily concerned with the self. The role of the clan was significant in the performance of the sacrificial ritual. In the new doctrine, with the emergence of the individual as the seeker of knowledge and liberation, the clan became marginal. The emphasis on the self and the break-up of the older social relations contributed to the alienation of the individual in the nascent urban settings.

The doctrine involved a move away from the ritual to the analytical and speculative argument. The sage Uddālaka Aruni's explanation of *ātman*, soul, incorporates empirical knowledge and is rational in its approach. In the dialogue between Naciketas and Yama, the *ātman* is represented as the charioteer of the body, 'a strongly *kṣatriya* symbol'. Since the *ātman* incarnates itself in a body in each life, *mokṣa* came to be understood as the release from this cycle of repeated lives. The idea that *mokṣa*, and not heaven, was the desired destination of an individual brought about a fundamental change in the manner in which life and death came to be perceived.

Thapar then connects the theory once more with social reality. This connection, she tells us, lay in the concept of *karma* and *saṁsāra* according to which the actions undertaken in this life determine the next birth of one's *ātman*. If the actions are good, then the soul is reborn among the higher castes, but if the actions are evil, the soul is reborn among the lowly, such as an animal or an outcaste. However, if one achieves the knowledge of *brahman* through meditation and renunciatory practices, the soul does not have to undergo rebirth. It was the *brāhmaṇa* authors of the *Smṛti* texts who determined good or bad conduct. Good conduct meant observing the *dharma* of one's caste. *Dharma* became the ubiquitous principle which now replaced sacrifice as the sustainer of the universe.

Social inequalities came to be explained in terms of *karma* and transmigration of the soul. The necessity for social differentiation justified the existence of the *varṇa* hierarchy. While the philosophical quest for liberation continued, the doctrine became the means to control the conduct of the underprivileged in society.

Thus, Thapar has shown that the theory of *ātman* and *brahman* was a philosophical innovation, but it succeeded in conserving wealth by negating the centrality of the sacrificial ritual. This resulted in the transition from clan-based societies to states with pronounced social hierarchies and enhanced power of the *kṣatriyas*. However, the *brāhmaṇas* retained their authority as the custodians of the rules of caste, which also influenced the future trajectory of each individual soul. Thapar does not ignore the importance of the philosophical basis of the new doctrines but insists that we should not lose sight of the socio-economic compulsions that prompted these innovations and their material consequences.

The transition of the religious ideal from the performance of sacrificial rituals to a quest for the liberation of the soul is a favourite theme of Thapar's and she has revisited it in other essays. In one such, for instance, the emphasis shifts to tracing the socio-religious roots of asceticism and nonviolence ('Ideology, Society and the Upaniṣads', chapter 2 of this volume). In this essay, Thapar traverses a long trajectory comprising issues such as sacrifice as a gift-exchange system and an occasion for the consumption of wealth, the decline of sacrifice with the emergence of agriculture as the new mode of subsistence, *kṣatriya* ownership of land and enhancement of *kṣatriya* power, and the Upanishadic breakthrough of *ātman–brāhmaṇ* and the centrality of the individual in the new doctrine.

Thapar then moves on to a discussion on the rise of Buddhism and its relationship with the *Upaniṣads*. She mentions that although the Buddha followed through with some ideas of the *Upaniṣads*, he also transformed them. According to Buddhism, desire was the root cause of suffering. Therefore, elimination of desire was declared to be the most significant aim in life. To this was linked the doctrine of *karma* and the next life. The emergence of a new religion usually presupposes the involvement of new social groups. If the *Upaniṣads* drew upon the concerns of certain categories of *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas*, Buddhist ideology changed the paradigm to focus on the concerns of the land-owning *gahapatis* and the trading *seṭṭhis*. Renunciation was central to both the *Upaniṣads* and Buddhism but unlike the ascetics, who were symbolically dead to society, the Buddhist renouncers, as members of the *saṅgha*, became an alternative society. While the earlier *Upaniṣads* were the starting point of the distinct ideological position of the Buddhists, they discarded or questioned Vedic theories and practices. This generated irreconcilable differences between the two. The emerging monarchies began to seek legitimation of their authority through patronage of the Buddhist *saṅghas* rather than the performance of Vedic sacrifices. The ideal king was now one who ruled in accordance with *dhamma* or the ethical system as developed by Buddhist thinking. The widespread acceptance of Buddhism also signalled a move away from the ethic of groups and castes to that of the society per se. Thapar thus traces both the parallels and the differences between Buddhist and Upanishadic thoughts and their material basis.

The first thing to notice in Thapar's discussion on the transition from the performance of sacrificial rituals to a philosophical quest for immortality of the soul is her emphasis on the contexts, both material and ideological. The genre of texts that she primarily looks at is the *Upaniṣads*. The Upanishadic discourse is so abstruse and apparently remote from the immediate socio-temporal context in which it is located that it does not easily lend itself to historical analysis. Historians—particularly those who are sensitive to the need of reconstructing the material basis of historical structures and processes—therefore, tend to ignore the subtle philosophical discussions as matters beyond the realm of history. While she carefully lays out the material context, Thapar, however, takes proper cognizance of the philosophical content of the *Upaniṣad*s and patiently works out the correspondence between the two. The essay is so holistic in its approach that from tangible developments such as expansion of agriculture and the emergence of new social groups, the rise of urban centres, and the formation of territorial kingdoms on the one hand to inscrutable concepts like *ātman* and *brahman* on the other, no significant issue that has any bearing on an understanding of the processes of socio-religious change in the later Vedic period is left out. The other important issue is the manner in which Thapar demonstrates the interdependence between ideas and practices. She shows how a change in the material context creates the precondition for the rise of new ideas, which in turn influences the material context. In this dialectic, both are derived from and reflect one another.

* * *

Another theme to which Thapar keeps coming back is that of the renouncer in the social context. She notes that a central aspect of religion in India is the unusual and paradoxical presence of the renouncer, not just as a marginal figure but as a person of considerable authority. In a seminal essay on the traditions of renunciation in early India ('Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-culture?', chapter 6 of this volume), she argues that renunciation was not a life-negating principle. Instead, the techniques adopted by ascetics and renouncers are based on the belief that life can be the means of discovering immortality and freedom. She points out that inherent in renunciation was the notion of dissent, but its articulation often lacked clarity. The renouncers did not try to radically alter society but acted as tacit agents of change.

This essay is a perfect example of the multiple perspectives that Thapar feels must be employed to tease out the historical significance of a religious complex such as renunciation. The individual ascetic is marginal to society. Thapar, therefore, focuses on groups of organized renouncers such as the Buddhists and the Jainas, the Śaivas and the Vaiṣṇavas, and the Yogis and the Nāthapanthis, many of whom were deeply influenced by Tantrism. Thus, she investigates the concept of renunciation and its specific manifestations in multiple religious contexts.

The period under scrutiny is enormous, stretching from the mid first millennium BCE to nearly the mid second millennium CE. This long time span witnessed fundamental changes in material contexts, some of which have been espoused to locate the socio-religious movements in their proper perspective. At least three such contexts are apparent. The first relates to the break-up of tribal society and the consequent decline in kinship ties in the later Vedic period. This, coupled with the beginning of urbanization with its attendant anonymity and alienation in the sixth–fifth centuries BCE, brought about a major change in religious expression. The second refers to the penetration of heterodox sects in south India in the wake of the Roman trade and the trade with Southeast Asia in the early centuries of the first millennium CE. The third is concerned with the rise of Śaiva monasticism from the latter half of the first millennium CE. These monasteries functioned as instruments of acculturation and proselytization of those not affiliated to any institutional religion. In this, they had to compete with the Buddhists and the Jainas for extension of the sphere of their influence as well as for power and economic control. Royal patronage in the form of land grants played a crucial role in this process, turning the monasteries into establishments exercising feudal authority. Thapar has shown how each of these had its contribution in shaping the particular form and direction that the monastic organizations would take.

Another perspective pertains to the range of associated ideas and practices that make up the complex of renunciation. Through a series of closely reasoned arguments, Thapar makes evident the fact that renunciation was an expression of dissent and protest. This is a long essay and she works her way through a maze of issues and contexts, but the theme that anchors her discussion is dissent and protest. When the dense set of arguments is reduced to their bare bones, Thapar seems to suggest that renunciation remained a consistent and significant attitude and component of Indian society which, from time to time, under specific socio-economic conditions, produced protest movements. The transformation of the movements into sects and their organization into monastic institutions blunted the edge of their protest. Therefore, what was once a counter-culture became a parallel society. But disgruntled members, concerned with the quest for personal salvation, split from the parallel society, generating a similar cycle of protest and its domestication. Thus, there was a periodic rise and fall of protest movements in the religious sphere but the impulse to dissent and renounce stayed. The essay exemplifies the methodology that Thapar created and followed in order to explore the historical significance of religious phenomena.

Thapar obviously considers this cluster of ideas and practices quite central to Indian society, for she has explored this dynamics with differing emphases in a number of other essays, such as 'Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millenium BC in Northern India', 'Dissent and Protest in Early Indian Traditions', and 'The Householder and the Renouncer in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Traditions' (chapters 3, 5, and 7 of this volume).

* * *

Each essay in this volume is important in itself, unravelling categories and providing rare insights into each individual topic. But, apart from the two sets of essays discussed above, I must mention a personal favourite—Thapar's essay on the long and tangled process of the construction of Hinduism ('Syndicated Hinduism', chapter 12 of this volume). She argues that unlike the Semitic religions such as Christianity and Islam, which began with a founder and a structure at a point in time and evolved largely in relation to them, Hinduism has been constituted largely through a range of reactions to specific historical situations. She then traces the history of the religious forms—a conglomeration of which eventually came to be described as Hinduism—from the Harappan religion to the contemporary period, showing how the varied forms coalesced into a recognizable identity through the mediation of multiple agencies such as Orientalist scholars, Christian missionaries, and leaders of reform movements, among others. It is a near-impossible task to achieve within the confines of a single essay, but Thapar succeeds admirably, without compromising any of her analytical rigour or neatness of craft. Moreover, the essay is not merely an academic exercise. She says that it is 'a comment' about 'a contemporary [the essay was originally published in 1997], resurgent, active movement, largely galvanised for political ends' that tends to posit 'the indigenous religions into a monolithic, uniform religion'. The observation is more relevant today. Thus Thapar's commitment to authenticity of history makes her respond to attempts to falsify it, not only by inept historians but also by politically motivated ones.

I invite the readers to embark on an intellectual journey and discover for themselves the many facets of Thapar's deeply perceptive and meticulous treatment of the history of early Indian religions.

1

*Sacrifice, Surplus, and the Soul**

The sage Yājñavalkya, discoursing on the transmigration of the soul from one body to the next, described it as analogous with the caterpillar who, when it comes to the end of a leaf, draws itself together and moves onto another leaf, or else like the goldsmith, who, taking a piece of gold, transforms it into another shape, more beautiful perhaps than the first.[1] Both analogies are actions that result in change: in the first there is movement from one object to another, and in the second there is a mutation within the same substance. These ideas are crucial to the understanding of the soul and immortality as developed in the *Upaniṣads*, the earliest recorded discourses (as they are often called) of any length in India on theories of the immortality of the soul.[2] The two analogies concretize the essence of the doctrine of transmigration, which was to become culturally hegemonic as the bedrock of religious thinking among many sects in India. It might therefore be worth examining more closely the initial process that enabled this doctrine to take root.

The *Upaniṣads* as a subject of scholarship have generally been left to the domain of philosophers, who see them as fundamental to many philosophical systems, and to grammarians and philologists. However, texts, and especially those with such specific concerns, are anchored in points of time that give them a historical dimension. The historical moment is linked both to the genesis of an idea and to its reception—two aspects with which this lecture is concerned. The *Upaniṣads* are at one level philosophical speculations on an abstract theme, but at another they are embedded in the society to which they relate. They encapsulate a process that leads to the formulation of an ideology. The interaction of this ideology with its environment, its source of power, and its historical ambience need to be inquired into.[3] Ideology speaks of and from a social order and ideas can be used to justify or legitimate the particular order. This is not to suggest that there is a simplistic correlation between ideology and society, for ideology is not merely a pale reflection of reality.[4] In many early societies ideology is incorporated into religious beliefs but articulated in ritual. If ritual is tied to the social order, however, then it can also be seen as the questioning of that order. In early Indian thought ritual is viewed as *karma*/action; therefore, it has been suggested that it would be more appropriate in the case of India to speak of orthopraxy than of orthodoxy.[5]

The period of the composition of the early and major *Upaniṣads* is generally taken as from about the eighth to sixth centuries BC.[6] They emerge out of earlier compositions, stemming from the *Ṛg Veda* and the *Brāhmaṇas* in particular but deviating sufficiently from these origins to become foundational to new groups of thinkers, some of whom were to take a conservative perspective and others, such as the Buddhists, who were to be regarded as heterodox. They represent, therefore, a watershed between the Vedic corpus and the new ideologies, epitomizing features of what has often been called an 'axial age'. The earlier texts emphasize the centrality of the sacrificial ritual, whereas the new ideologies move away from this and explore alternative eschatologies with, initially at least, an absence of ritual.

The historian's concern is with why this change occurred. It has been argued that possibly the *Upaniṣads* represent an interaction between Indo-European or Aryan ideas and the belief and practices of the local non-Aryans or pre-Aryans in northern India.[7] However, once it is conceded that we cannot identify any group as specifically Aryan, it becomes difficult to support an argument that insists so precisely on the differentiation of Aryan and non-Aryan.[8] It might therefore be more feasible to look at other aspects of the historical background. This lecture is not intended to explore all the historical changes of the time, but rather to examine more closely the relevance of a few of them.

The contribution of non-Vedic thought to the evolution of the concepts of the *Upaniṣads* remains hypothetical since there are no texts or well-articulated traditions of such thought. That some merging from such sources occurred is very likely given that Vedic Sanskrit itself reflects non-Aryan features suggestive of bilingualism.[9] Nevertheless, the concepts of the *Upaniṣads* addressed themselves to the existing expressions of Vedic belief and ritual, and to that extent they reflect a departure from them. This was a change in the paradigm of knowledge. The nature of the change was a shift from the acceptance of the *Vedas* as revealed and as controlled by ritual to the possibility that knowledge could derive from intuition, observation, and analysis.

The *Upaniṣads* were explorations in the search for enlightenment of the human condition and release from its bonds. This was not a situation involving priest and ritual nor the regular teacher-and-pupil learning of the *Vedas*. This knowledge was part of the oral tradition but was deliberately kept to a limited audience. The teachers were unconventional and those whom they taught were specially selected.[10] The latter could, however, include those who would normally be excluded from Vedic ritual—those of uncertain social origin such as Satyakāma[11] and women such as Maitreyī, the wife of Yājñavalkya. They are included perhaps to make a point.[12] It is sometimes argued that Satyakāma was accepted not because the social status of those taught was irrelevant, but because, having spoken the truth, he was recognized as a *brāhmaṇa*. However, his uncertain origin was sufficient to suggest that the question of his being a *brāhmaṇa* was not central. Where *brāhmaṇas* were the sons of *dāsīs*, they were referred to as *dāsyaḥ-putraḥ*, but nevertheless respected.[13] The legitimacy of *brāhmaṇa* teachers was sought to be established by their status in lists of succession relating to their function as priests.[14] In an otherwise patriarchal society it is curious that matronymics are so prominent in these succession lists. The *kṣatriya* teachers have no particular qualifications. They were the *rājās*, the chiefs or oligarchs, *kṣatriya* being derived from *kṣatr*, meaning power. They are not included in the succession lists nor listed separately, although on some matters they instruct the *brāhmaṇas*. The form of dialogue was new, and, in breaking away from ritual and *mantra*, it seemed to be a rationalizing movement. At the same time, however, the mysticism of the doctrine introduced other elements. The location of the discussions were frequently the residences of *kṣatriyas* or occasionally those of *brāhmaṇas*. The *pariṣads*, or assemblies of the *kṣatriyas*, mentioned as locations for these dialogues, included those of Kāśī, Videha, and the Kuru-Pañcāla. Pravahana Jaivali of the Kuru-Pañcāla taught Śvetaketu Aruneya, the son of Gautama, and his father also came to the *rājā* to be taught.[15]

It was understood that the new doctrine was concerned with knowledge not about the mundane world, but with the conceptualization of other worlds,[16] although this exploration helped systematize knowledge about the mundane world. Despite the shift of focus to new methods of attaining knowledge instead of conforming to Vedic ritual practice, sacrificial rituals were not suddenly discontinued. The deities of earlier times were not denied, but rather their role tended to fade. If the sacrificial ritual was limited in its efficacy or ineffective in its purpose, then what were the other forms that could be central to the human condition? These interests revolved around questions of mortality and immortality—the immortality of the soul, the realization of the self, and belief in rebirth and retribution. Much of this was tied into examining the nature of reality: Is reality what we perceive around us or is there a reality beyond this which becomes tangible only through new techniques of perception? These involved control over the complementary categories of body and mind (*yoga*) and meditation (*dhyāna*), both ideally requiring a form of life given to austerity if not asceticism (*tapas*). This centered on the individual as the seeker of immortality through his own effort. Salvation of a limited kind had been present in the ritual of sacrifice, intended, among other things, for the attainment of the heightened pleasures of the heaven of Indra. But now the concern was not for heaven, but for release or liberation, *mokṣa*. This was not initially associated with sin and redemption but was conceptualized as the liberation of the soul.

Mokṣa was seen as related to the concept of *ātman-brahman*.[17] *Brahman*, necessary to the creation of the universe that it enters, is manifest in the *ātman*, the soul, which is an essential part of every individual life. *Mokṣa* therefore lies in achieving the realization of the *ātman-brahman*, releasing it from the bonds of the body and from repeatedly having to undergo death and rebirth from body to body. The transmigration of the *ātman* must cease before *mokṣa* is possible. In other words, the caterpillar must stop moving from leaf to leaf. Perhaps because the new doctrine distanced itself from the sacrificial ritual and drew on mystic concepts, claiming almost supernatural powers, it was referred to as the secret doctrine, *guhya-adeśa*, *rahasyam*. One statement actually equates the secret doctrine with the *Upaniṣad—iti rahasyam iti upaniṣad*. The texts tend to retain this character of closed knowledge.[18] The new doctrine questioned the sacrificial cult—it alone could not be a means of liberating the *ātman*. The *Vedas* were said to be inferior to the now more frequently discussed alternative belief systems.[19] Sarcastic references to the greedy behaviour of priests at the sacrificial ritual highlighted doubts about the ritual and its main actors.[20]

Another startling feature is that the exploration of these new ideas was often not by *brāhmaṇas* but by *kṣatriyas*. Thus, the *rājā* of the Kuru-Pañcāla explains to Śvetaketu that his father, though learned, is not familiar with all aspects of the new teaching, and later Gautama is initiated into the teaching by the *rājā*; *brāhmaṇas* who come to Uddālaka Aruni seeking knowledge on *ātman-brahman* are directed by him to the Kekeya *rājā*, Aśvapati; in the dialogue between Ajātaśatru the *rājā* of Kāśī and Dṛptabalaki of the Gārgya clan, it is clear that the former is the more knowledgeable.[21] The noticeably important role of the *kṣatriyas* has been commented upon both in the *Upaniṣads* and by modern scholars.[22] The *rājā* of the Pañcālas says to the learned *brāhmaṇa* Gautama, 'This knowledge has never in the past been vested in any *brāhmaṇa*, but I shall tell it to you.'[23] This is striking coming from the *rājā* of the Kuru-Pañcāla, an area noted for its learned *brāhmaṇas* and frequency of the best sacrificial rituals.[24] Those who discoursed on the doctrine taught it either to their sons or to selected pupils. These *kṣatriyas* included the *rājās* of the Uśināra and Matsya clans and of the Kekeya, Kuru-Pañcāla, Kāśī, Kosala, and above all, Janaka of Videha,[25] substantially of the western and middle Ganga plain.[26] It is impressive that this vast geographical area saw the mobility of *rājās*, *brāhmaṇas*, and ideas at so early a stage.

The interest of the *brāhmaṇas* in the new teaching may have stemmed from dissidents seeking alternative philosophies or the curious exploring new ideas. Those attracted to asceticism would have supported such discussion. However, some *brāhmaṇas* who taught the new doctrine received lavish gifts or charged huge fees,[27] and others, who were by no account ascetics, are ascribed on occasion as extremely wealthy and learned.[28] Categories of knowledge were hierarchical, reflected a spectrum of interests,[29] and incorporated what appears to be a folk or subaltern knowledge. This is suggested, for example, by the inclusion of Raikva as a teacher. He sits under his cart scratching himself and hardly behaves as would upper-caste teachers.[30] Distinctions were made between knowledge as and for ritual, as intuition, as intellectual speculation that encouraged debate and the dialectical form of argument, and as knowledge of the *ātman*. The participation of some *brāhmaṇas* may have led to the eventual inclusion of this material as part of the Vedic corpus, and it also has occasional references to other earlier Vedic compositions. But the later appropriation of the *Upaniṣads* could also have been an attempt to stem the heresies of the Buddhists and other sects by tracing the origins of their deviation to Upaniṣadic thought. Modern philosophers continue to disagree as to whether Buddhism is to be treated as a part of the spectrum of post-Vedic thought rooted in the *Upaniṣads* or as a radical departure from the *Upaniṣads.*[31]

The new teaching moved away from *brāhmaṇas* as priests to *kṣatriyas* and *brāhmaṇas* as teachers, parallel to the shift away from ritual and religious duties, which required a high degree of specialization in mantras and rites. Max Weber distinguishes between the priest, the magician, and the charismatic prophet. The priest entreats the deity via prayer and sacrifice, whereas the magician coerces the deity via ritual. The priest eventually emerges as a functionary of a social group rather than of individuals, and the office becomes hereditary.[32] The teachers of the *Upaniṣads* do not fall into any of these categories as they are distinct from the priests, and, although their teaching leads to a new belief system of a higher order, they are not prophets. Priests as mediators between men and gods were not required in this system, since in the new teaching each individual was responsible for his or her own salvation and the role of the deity could be absent. Knowledge had earlier included the kinds of questions controlled by the traditional priest, but in effect the new knowledge superseded the old.

The move away from the sacrificial ritual requires some comment. The term for sacrifice, *yajña*, means to consecrate, to worship, to convert the profane into the holy. Sacrifice as a ritual involves the one ordering the sacrifice or the patron of the ritual, the *yajamāna*; the *devatā*/gods to whom the prayer is addressed; the *brāhmaṇa* priests who act as intermediaries and mediate between *the yajamāna* and the gods; and the offering, the *dravya* or *bali*, which is transferred from the ownership of the *yajamāna* and gifted to the gods via the mediation of the priests. There is no counter-transfer of any visible equivalent.[33] The concept of *tyāga*/renunciation, became increasingly important in the debate on whether there should be a renunciation of the outcome of the ritual. The sacrificial rituals were of various kinds. The smallest and most compact were the *gṛhya*, or domestic rituals, using a single priest. The *śrauta*, or traditional rituals, were more elaborate, with several priests and altars, and continued for some days.[34] To these may be added the rituals associated with the acquisition of power and fertility where the patron of the sacrifice was preferably a *kṣatriya rājā*.

The *yajamāna*, or patron, had first to be changed from a profane condition to a sacralized one. This involved a lengthy purification during which all other activities were set aside, which automatically excluded as *yajamānas* those who were essential to the daily curriculum, such as men who laboured and women. The *yajamāna* was stripped of authority during this process and underwent a change of status through ritual cleansing. The location for the ceremony had also to be purified and demarcated, for, outside this area, all killing was not immolation but murder.[35] The offering could be first fruits, the *bali* and the *bhāga*, or could be specially selected objects, such as animals identified as the victims of the ritual. The offering was owned by the *yajamāna* and was of value, which introduced an element of renunciation. An offering implies an existing asymmetrical relationship whereas a gift creates such a relationship. Theories on the purpose and function of the sacrifice range over many explanations such as homage to and communion with the gods, catharsis, renunciation, rejuvenation, and social legitimacy. The Vedic sacrifice had many functions; what it distinctly was not, however, was a covenant between a man and his jealous God.

Ritual activity, even where it involves a simple, everyday act, must be demarcated from the mundane, sometimes by archaizing its artefacts and its articulation. The demarcation points to the ritual having a different connotation than mundane acts. Nevertheless, ritual is also social action inasmuch as it involves a performer and a professional and therefore becomes symbolic of a social statement. Such a statement has many levels of interpretation, including the religious, the philosophical, the relationship between the performer and the professional, the perception of each of these by the audience—whether physically present or not—and the material objects involved in the performing of the ritual. Rituals therefore carry multiple messages. Even when the ritual was performed by a single household it was a signal to the community. Major ritual occasions, even as early as the *Ṛg Veda*, were community occasions.

The *brāhmaṇa* as priest had a relationship of reciprocity with the *kṣatriya* embodying political power. The sacrificial ritual was an exchange in which the gods were the recipients of offerings, *bali*, the priests were the recipients of gifts and fees, *dāna* and *dakṣinā*, and the *kṣatriya* as the one who orders the ritual, was the recipient of the benevolence of the gods and of status and legitimacy among men. Reciprocity involves an offering, a giving up or 'sacrifice' of something valuable. For the *kṣatriya* this consisted of the visible *bali*, the voluntary tribute in the form of material goods as well as the acceptance of the mediation of the *brāhmaṇa* with the gods, which was to some degree an acceptance of the *kṣatriya's* dependence on the *brāhmaṇa*. The priests were therefore deeply involved in the articulation of power in their relations with the *kṣatriyas* through the ritual of sacrifice. The new teaching, however, had little use for this particular interconnection. Admittedly, the same two social categories, the *kṣatriya* and the *brāhmaṇa*, who were the main participants in the sacrificial ritual, were now involved in the new doctrine, but their roles and purposes were different. The *brahma-kṣatra* hierarchy was reversed in the acquisition of mystical knowledge.[36]

A sacrificial ritual involves resources. It also requires the mobilizing of resources and attention to the social problems posed by the procurement of offerings. The required wealth could be a substantial portion of the *yajamāna's* resources. Not only was the best of livestock sacrificed but the gifts to be made to the priests in terms of cattle wealth and golden objects, if taken literally, would have materially impoverished many a *yajamāna*. When something of value was offered it was in the belief and expectation of receiving in return, at a later point, something of even greater value.

The frequency of the different types of rituals—such as daily, new and full moon, and seasonal sacrifices that increased with the agricultural calendar, rites of passage, and those intended to obtain either a boon or expiation—would be in part dependent on the availability of offerings.[37] The mobilization of resources would initially be the responsibility of the family and clan members, whose resources were limited. The common sharing of offerings enhanced the unity of the participants, making the sacrifice a collective activity. Gradually, the collective element receded and the focus turned to the individual *yajamāna*. This was the price paid by the individual aspiring to status and power and using the sacrificial ritual as a means of claiming legitimacy. The power was intended to assert an authority beyond that of the ordinary authority of the chief of the clan. This authority was to increase over time and become qualitatively different in the claim, not of chiefship but of kingship, with the mutation of chiefdoms into kingdoms.

There was an element of gift exchange involved in the relationship between the *brāhmaṇa* and the *kṣatriya* through the sacrificial ritual. The participants were not of equal status and the *brāhmaṇas*, even when consecrating a *rājā*, stated their independence by their allegiance to Soma.[38] Reciprocity was not always balanced, and the obligation to give was that of the *kṣatriya*; to receive, that of the *brāhmaṇa*. The exchange was not protected by law but was dictated by custom. The acceptance of the gift bound the two participants as partners and reiterated their bonds.

The historical context of the sacrificial ritual is first encountered in the *Ṛg Veda*. The function of the *rājā*, as the warrior chief, was to protect the *viś*, or clan, even if such protection involved skirmishes and raids against other clans, and to augment resources through cattle raids, which in a cattle-rearing culture are imperative. Raiding was a proof of manhood and a matter of honour and assumed the character almost of a ritual process. It is idealized in the heroic qualities of the lifestyle of the god Indra. A successful raid required leadership but also drew on the prayers of priests interceding with the gods. The subsequent ritual was a thanksgiving and a means of distributing the booty. This was the subject of the many *dāna-stutis*, or hymns of praise, in which *brāhmaṇa* poets eulogized the prowess of those *rājās* who had increased their wealth through raids.[39] Wealth was computed primarily in terms of cattle, horses, chariots, and gold. These were often listed in exaggerated amounts—sixty thousand head of cattle and a thousand horses—where the exaggeration was intended as an incentive to those *rājās* who had heard the praise of others and, it was hoped, would emulate them. The availability of resources affected attitudes toward the offering. Because they were herders, animals were normally not killed indiscriminately for food and there was a prohibition on the eating of the animals as daily fare. They were consumed only on special occasions, when a guest visited or after a ritual.[40] This was a mechanism for conserving the herd. However, the archaeological evidence from contemporary sites suggests a larger-than-normal consumption of beef.[41] Possibly the supply of prime livestock diminished until the cow gradually was declared inviolable. The ritual conferred legitimacy on the *rājā*, and the hymns of praise articulated his power. The *rājā* bestowed *dāna*/gifts in the form of wealth on the priests and acquired status in return. This was of central importance in societies that consisted of small, highly competitive groups in which there could be a quick turnover of status, resources, and power.

Subsequently, two trends became evident. One was the concentration of power with the *rājā*, now more frequently mentioned as *kṣatriya*. This was accompanied by a change in the primary resource base from cattle herding to agriculture, and particularly to wet rice cultivation in the middle Ganga plain. The *kṣatriya* was no longer just the cattle-raiding warrior. He augmented his wealth by settling new lands and encouraging their cultivation. The territories where the clan settled, the *janapadas*, were named after the *kṣatriya* ruling clan, such as the Kuru-Pañcāla, Kosala, Videha, and so on. This did not imply their ownership of the land but is indicative of enhanced political power. Cultivation was carried out by the *viś*, or clansmen, assisted by the labour of the *śūdras* and *dāsas* who were outside the clan. The *kṣatriya* demanded and received prestations from them. We are told that the *kṣatriya* eats the *viś*, or the clan, as the deer eats the grain, so the *viś* is subordinate to the *kṣatriya*.[42]

The occasion for making prestations was the sacrificial ritual, and this was the second feature that had changed. There were now a variety of *yajñas*, which ranged from simple daily rituals required of heads of households to more elaborate ones.[43] The most complex were those asserting *kṣatriya* authority, often lasting many months, such as the *rājasūya* and the *aśvamedha* and the *vājapeya*, or rejuvenation ritual. The *rājasūya* involved the conquest of the four quarters and the amassing of tribute before the ritual could begin. *Kṣatriyas* who performed these rites were transformed from *rājās* into *mahārājās*.[44] Such rituals often incorporated the rhetoric and symbols of the raids and skirmishes of pastoral-agricultural societies, even though these were now en route to becoming established kingdoms. Simple rituals could require the gift of a cow to the priest, but elaborate rituals brought in large amounts of wealth as sacrificial fees and gifts.[45] Such rituals were in effect a display, consumption, and destruction of wealth and therefore presupposed the availability of considerable resources to the patron of the ritual.

The specific use to which the wealth was put tended to convert the sacrifice into something of a potlatch. The more the wealth expended on the ritual, the more, it was assumed, would come back to the *yajamāna* through the pleasure of the gods, the discipline of giving, successful warfare, and good harvests; but above all it further raised the status of the *yajamāna*. At the same time, however, it depleted his treasury. The competitive spirit, encouraged by the earlier eulogistic *dāna-stutis*, still persisted and probably resulted, as far as wealth was concerned, in what has been called an 'alternating disequilibrium'.[46] Where the head of the household, the *gṛhapati*, was encouraged to perform frequent calendrical sacrifices, the voluntary tribute to the *kṣatriya* would also decrease because of the demands of these sacrifices. Given the absence of expensive burials in the cultures of the Ganga plain, unlike most other contemporary high cultures in Asia, the utilization of wealth was concentrated on the ritual of sacrifice. The ritual, therefore, combined a testimony of religious affirmation with a claim to status on the part of the *yajamāna*, as well as a demonstration of wealth and resources.

Potlatch, it has been argued, implies maximizing net outgoings.[47] Property is distributed seemingly voluntarily but in fact under compulsion of the ritual. Ostensibly it bears no interest, although a higher return is implicit. This, however, is different from capital accumulation since it cannot be collected on demand or indeed be repaid at all. It is not a series of gifts, but a series of counter gifts. The return gift creates a debt that has to be met in the next ritual. It is an exchange of inalienable objects between people in a state of reciprocal dependence and is particularly evident in societies with a clan structure and a strong kinship organization. The obtaining of gifts and wealth for the ritual is from the labour of the family and kinsmen. When this system changes and the labour of nonclan persons is introduced, with fresh adjustments in relationships between the clans and within the clan, then the handling of wealth also begins to change. Access to wealth begins to require coercive measures. The production of wealth draws on a different kind of impersonal relationship. In such a situation, attitudes of the major *yajamānas*/patrons toward the sacrificial ritual would presumably also change. Reciprocity was between *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas* and the competition was among the latter, expending their wealth.

The historical background to the *Upaniṣads* depicts a society that was no longer predominantly that of cattle-herding clans. The more common occupation was agriculture with some incipient trade. The frequent and ready violence of raids was now replaced by political control and alliances. Agricultural resources required not capturing and raiding but the availability of regular and coordinated labour. This is reflected in the intensification of the *varṇa* or status hierarchy, where the upper castes claim lineage descent, whereas the fourth caste, that of the *śūdras*, has no lineage base. This was a method of distancing those who provided labour.[48] Claims to ownership of land still lay largely with the clan, although a slow shift is perceptible to claims by families, perhaps as a result of rights of usage.[49] In the middle Ganga region, which included Kāśī, Kosala, and Videha, marshlands and forest were cleared for settlement, assisted to some degree by new iron tools. The cultivation of wet rice led to larger yields and increased wealth. The consumption of wealth in sacrificial rituals may initially have been a stimulus to production, but perhaps when resources could not keep pace with this consumption, the ritual began to have a negative effect. Unlike the produce of herders, grain can be stored for long periods and some accumulation is possible. This may also have resulted in an upward demographic trend requiring more resources. Archaeology provides evidence of increasing numbers of settlements and larger settlements, some of which were to gradually develop into urban centres.[50] *Kṣatriya* rule over these settlements was intended to protect the settlers and maintain minimum laws. For this the *kṣatriya* received a share of the produce in the form of what began as voluntary tributes such as the *bali* and the *bhāga* from the heads of households: such tributes were eventually to evolve into taxes. This encouraged the accumulation of wealth, which ultimately provided resources for the emergence of kingdoms and states. Such wealth was necessary to the new demands of incipient state systems, such as a rudimentary administration, an army, and the expenses of kingship. In addition, the universalizing of religious belief and practice, as in Buddhism, sometimes lent ideological support to the state, as in the Mauryan period.

Let us return to the question of why the *kṣatriyas* explored the doctrines that came to be included in the *Upaniṣads*. Were they moving away from the sacrificial ritual solely because of philosophical curiosity, or was there also, perhaps subconsciously, a search for an alternative that would discourage the expending of wealth—wealth that could be eventually diverted toward maintaining a state system with enhanced powers for the *kṣatriyas* far exceeding those of the earlier chiefships? Such a shift, of course, was not seen in terms of rational well-being or economic theory. The discontinuance of the Vedic sacrificial ritual would break the nexus between the *brāhmaṇa* and the *kṣatriya* and would provide a new role for the *kṣatriya*, more in consonance with the broader changes of the time. While the *brāhmaṇa* and the *kṣatriya* were interlocked in a competition for status, the sacrificial ritual, although seemingly separating their powers, in fact made them interdependent.[51] The *kṣatriya* may have preferred to be released from this dependence. The reality of power was seen now not only as divine dispensation but also in terms of access to resources. The power of the *kṣatriya* did not need to be circumscribed by the sacrificial ritual.

The new doctrine first evolved in areas that had experienced an increase in wealth. The question of whether this wealth would be accumulated as the basis for greater power or be consumed in the sacrificial ritual may have been expressed and considered. Was the break from the prestation economy encouraged as a search for legitimation through other means? Was this tied into an interest in a wider *kṣatriya* identity in areas where there was a perceptible change toward establishing kingship?

The new doctrine required discipline, meditation, and concern with the self alone. It called for neither intermediaries nor deities, which therefore gave it a universalism in the pursuit of *mokṣa*. Whereas the sacrificial ritual required the contribution, to a greater or lesser degree, of the clan and thereby underlined clan identity, the new doctrine moved away from this identity and underlined the separation of the individual from the clan.[52] Meditation and yoga are best undertaken in isolation subsequent to the initial period of training with a teacher. The clan therefore was marginalized, and the individual emerged as the subject seeking knowledge and liberation. This placed a premium on removing oneself from one's society and renouncing social obligations, a sentiment that ran counter to involvement in clan activities required by the earlier rituals. Renunciation is also contrary to the accumulation of wealth, but the notion of such an accumulation was probably necessary for the idea of renunciation to be effective. The focus on the individual highlights the anomie of changing social relations: the breakup of clans as well as the alienation and skepticism was implicit in the new identities emerging in nascent urban centres.[53] This was to be further reinforced by the centrality of individual *nirvāṇa* in subsequent teachings, especially those of Mahāvīra and the Buddha.

If the reasons why the *kṣatriya* was supportive of this doctrine have to do with both philosophical curiosity and changes in social and political forms, these do not entirely explain its attraction for some *brāhmaṇas*. A change in the focus of these ideas was to introduce a substantial Brahmanical concern. It is significant that not all *brāhmaṇas* were familiar with the new doctrine: it was viewed initially as rather esoteric, meant only for the selected few. Those that supported it saw the limitations of the rituals and sought more innovative forms of liberation, even if these ultimately involved renunciation. The use of the vocabulary of release in relation to the soul may have been partially associated with release from social obligations as well. Did *brāhmaṇas* view renunciation with a nostalgia for the nomadic life that was disappearing[54] or with a concern that radical ideas had to be introduced gradually and that renunciation would provide freedom to experiment with new ideas, a freedom not permitted by rigidly controlled rituals?

Sporadic but vague speculation on these matters has been traced to earlier Vedic compositions. The departure from them lay in the forging of a consistent theory for which the observance of the earlier rituals was not required. The construction of this theory has its own history. Shamanistic origins have been suggested[55] in references to *munis*, *ṛṣis*, and *keśins*,[56] the long-haired ones flying through the air, living in isolation and seeking their own forms of knowledge, which included magic and meditation. They were the forerunners of the renouncers and the ascetics. The *yātudhāna* may well have been shamans and therefore seen as sorcerers and alien by Vedic priests. The lengthy period of training under a teacher as envisaged in the *Upaniṣads* required a desocialization from the family. Thus Śvetaketu left the home of his learned father and went elsewhere to attain knowledge.[57] Together with this, the secrecy of the doctrines is suggestive of shamanistic influence as are descriptions of the journeying of the soul.[58] The soul goes through the air, which opens out like a hole in the chariot wheel; it goes to the sun and moon; it journeys to the world of Brahmā, which is an elaborate movement through many heavens and multiple deities; it enters the clouds and then the rain, then plants and crops, which when eaten take it to the human body. The *ātman* can be larger than the universe and smaller than the mustard seed. The ecstatic state of the *ātman* when released from rebirth echoes shamanistic ecstasy when the spirit is said to be in communion with the divine.

These descriptions of the journeying of the soul and the idea of souls inhabiting plants and animals, were not, as many have pointed out, altogether alien to animistic views on the passage of the spirit.[59] If the archaeological picture of the Ganga plain provides a clue, it is that of a variety of coexisting and overlapping cultures. Fertility cults grew around the worship of trees and female deities often linked to sacred enclosures. The *stūpa* as a tumulus, perhaps with some funerary association,[60] may have drawn on ideas of a soul and an afterlife different from the Vedic. The proximity of megalithic burials in the Vindhyan region and central India indicates further the presence of non-Vedic religion. Cremation encourages a belief in an afterlife rather different from burials, which maintain greater continuity with the mundane. The reduction of the human body to a handful of ashes may have required, by way of a counterpoint, a focus on the disembodied soul and its continual reincarnation. Significantly, some *kṣatriyas* associated with the new doctrine belong to geographical areas often described as outside the boundaries of the *āryāvarta*, the land of the *āryas*,[61] suggesting the need to incorporate other cultures.

The working out of the doctrine involved knowledge which moved from ritual to analytical and speculative argument but included meditation and contemplation.[62] Thus Sanatkumāra asks to be taught the knowledge of the *ātman*—knowledge that later was to be regarded as the higher knowledge as against the lower knowledge of the *Vedas*. The sage Uddālaka Aruni, conversing with his arrogant son, Śvetaketu, provides an explanation of *ātman* which is almost rational in its incorporation of empirical knowledge, of queries, of doubts, and of observation and in its attempts at making categories.[63]

Among the most subtle discussions of the *ātman* is the dialogue between Naciketas and Yama, the god of Death.[64] The *ātman* is described as the charioteer of the body, which is the chariot, a strongly *kṣatriya* symbol.[65] *Mokṣa* was the releasing of the *ātman* from the cycle of repeated death, *punarmṛtyu*, because of being reincarnated in a body.[66] The notion of *mokṣa* as distinct from heaven introduced a change in the meaning of death in which the ideal was not a blissful life in the heaven of the heroes, but the release from being born repeatedly, a release requiring, among other things, an absence of desire. The breaking away from ritual and the search for knowledge about the soul and immortality led to other explorations of the self. But the theory was to be further formulated in a manner that linked it once more with social reality. This lay in the concept of *karma* and *saṃsāra*, the actions of one's life determining the future rebirth of one's *ātman*, an idea further developed by Yājñavalkya, among others.[67]

At death, there are two possible paths that the soul can take. One is the *devayāna*, the path of the gods, taken by the soul of one who meditates, has knowledge of *brahman*, and does not have to undergo rebirth. The soul ascends by stages through the day, the bright fortnight of the month, the six-month period, the year, to the sun, the lightning, and on to *brahman*, never to return.[68] The other path, the *pitṛyāna*, the path of the ancestors, because of the ties to rituals and *karma*/actions, is a temporary residence for the soul, for, remaining on the moon until its *karma* is exhausted, the soul enters a new birth returning via the air, smoke, vapor, clouds, and rain into crops.[69] A mortal ripens like grain and like grain is born again.[70] Repeated rebirth is a form of retribution. And then comes the crucial question: What determines the rebirth of the soul in a particular body? To this the answer is that if the individual's life has been one of good actions then the soul is reborn among the higher castes—*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, or *vaiśya*—but if the actions have been evil, then the choice of rebirth is among the lowly: the dog, the pig, or the *caṇḍāla*/the outcaste.[71] (The superiority of the *brāhmaṇa* and the *kṣatriya* and their interdependence is spoken of as epitomized in the relationship between Yājñavalkya and Janaka.[72]) There was a trace in this idea of the element of chance, since the soul entering a new body would have depended on who eats the plant, but this element of chance was denied by the increasing insistence on the ethical imperative.[73]

The answer to the next question, namely, 'Who determines good or bad conduct?' was, in later times and among some important sects, said to lie in the hands of those who prepared the norms of social behaviour—the *brāhmaṇa* authors of the *dharmasūtras*. According to them release from rebirth was possible only by observing the *dharma* of caste. Those born among the upper castes could claim a virtuous previous life in accordance with the rules of *dharma*. The relegation of the *caṇḍāla* to the status of the despised assumed that the *caṇḍāla* was receiving the just merit of evil conduct in a previous life. *Dharma* now replaced the sacrifice as that which sustains the universe.

The explanation of social inequalities on the basis of transmigration could keep society under the control of those who pronounced on conduct. The irrelevance of *varṇa* status in the new doctrine was nullified by this explanation of social differentiation. At one level, what began as a search for an alternative path concerned with releasing the *ātman* was pursued as such. But in social practice it was also reduced to a means of controlling the less privileged and justifying their condition on ethical grounds of *karma*. Reincarnation and *karma* are logically separable since moral justice can be accorded in other ways, as the eschatology of various religions suggests. At the philosophical and religious level the theory of *karma* was to become a central marker differentiating Indian religions from Semitic religions. Much of what followed in discussions on the soul within the Indian tradition drew on this theory.

The formulation of the notion of *karma* was gradual and doubtless tapped a range of ideas emanating from the societies settled in the Ganga plain. Mention has been made of a tribal origin but this is too vague an entity.[74] The more plausible argument points toward elements of the ritual of *śrāddha*, possibly suggesting the kind of connections that became more evident in the concept of *karma*. The link with the idea of *punarmṛtyu* would have given way to that of the cycle of rebirth. The transfer of merit has also been traced to a variety of origins. Among these is the suggestion that the notion of *tyāga*, renouncing the fruits of activity, which became the essence of the sacrificial ritual, was carried over into the new teaching.[75]

These ideas also helped to marginalize another aspect of the sacrificial ritual. If transmigration included animals as possible recipients of the *ātman*, then the killing of animals in sacrificial rituals could not be approved of.[76] Although this is not made explicit, it is implied in the statements on the forms in which the *ātman* can be reborn. This established a precedent of *ahimsā* and not eating the flesh of animals.

The doctrine did not remain secret for very long. It was carried from place to place by wandering teachers, the *parivrājakas*.[77] Inevitably, much of the post-Upaniṣadic thought traced itself to these teachers, who developed it in variant ways, some endorsing it and others opposing it. Frequently, the more prominent of the new teachers, such as Mahāvīra and the Buddha, were *kṣatriyas*, and the social aspects of the new philosophies were in part circumscribed by their caste concerns.[78] A later *Upaniṣad*, more conservative, is clear in its hostility to the contrary doctrines of those who wear the red robes and are opposed to the *Vedas*.[79] This was the birth of heterodoxy.

The theory of *ātman-brahman*, relating to the immortality of the soul and its release from the bonds of the body, was a philosophical innovation. By implication, it was a negation of the centrality of the prevalent sacrificial ritual. I have tried to argue that the search for an ideology independent of the sacrificial ritual may have had among its many interests the wish to conserve wealth. This was necessary for the transition from clan-based societies to states and kingdoms, in which the relative egalitarianism of the former gave way to social hierarchies and the enhanced power of the *kṣatriyas*. It is interesting that, in the oligarchies and in some kingdoms—the *gaṇa-rājyas, gaṇa-saṅghas*, and *rājyas*—of the subsequent period, where *kṣatriyas* were dominant, there is either an absence of sacrificial rituals of the Vedic variety or a decrease in their frequency. Nevertheless, the notion of transmigration as determined by the rules of caste reinstated the authority of the *brāhmaṇa*, even outside the sacrificial ritual, as pre-eminent among those determining the rules of conduct conducive to an improved rebirth. These were issues widely debated in post-Upaniṣadic times.

Arguing for a correlation between sacrifices, resources, and innovations in belief systems is not just an economic enterprise. It is an attempt to insist that ideologies are not history-free. In the complexities associated with Upaniṣadic and consequent ideas there are earlier features that were transmuted and others that were conditioned by contemporary needs. These may have coincided with the free-floating visions of the sages. Elements of embedded social contours in the sacrificial ritual should not be ignored in the larger explanation of philosophical speculations.

The universalizing of the doctrine influenced many sects and schools of thought that altered the intellectual landscape of early India. The centrality of the sacrificial ritual was displaced by the centrality of the notion of transmigration. This carried within it both the movement of the caterpillar from leaf to leaf and the mutation of the object of gold. The pursuit of comprehension of the immortality of the soul was intense. It moved from analytical arguments and discriminating discussions to a mystical idealism couched in poetically rich language. A different kind of immortality emanated from the discourses of the *Upaniṣads*, which themselves became a fountainhead for ideologies, some supportive and some dissenting, and which fashioned much of subsequent Indian thought.

Notes and References

* This is the text of the Forster Lecture on the theme of the Immortality of the Soul, delivered at the University of California, Berkeley, on April 8, 1992. I would like to thank Frits Staal for his initial encouragement of the idea and Kunal Chakrabarti for his comments on an earlier draft. I remember with particular warmth the long discussions on this subject with the late Barbara Stoller Miller. Published in *History of Religion*, vol. 33, no. 44 (University of Chicago Press Journals), 1994, 305–24. Copyright © 1994 by The University of Chicago Press. Reprinted with permission.

1. *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* (hereafter cited as *Bṛ. Up.*), 4.4.3–4. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (ed.), *The Principal Upanisads*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1953.
2. I am using the term discourse in its literal, dictionary meaning, namely, the discussion on a matter, and without reference to its extended meaning in recent works of critical theory.
3. Marc Bloch, *Ritual, History and Power*, London, Athlone, 1989, pp. 113ff.
4. Jorge Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, London, Hutchinson, 1979, pp. 50ff; David McLellan, *Ideology*, Milton Keynes, England, Oxford University Press, 1986.

5. Frits Staal, 'The Meaninglessness of Ritual', *Numen* 26, fasc. 1 (1979): 1–22, and *Rules without Meaning*, New York, North–Holland, 1989, pp. 116–17.
6. For an attempted chronology of segments of the texts, see Walter Ruben, 'Die Philosophie de Upaniṣads', in *Geschicte der indischen Philosophie*, Berlin, Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1954, pp. 113ff. There is a distinction between the early and the late *Upaniṣads* and the former include the ones that will be most frequently referred to here, namely, the *Bṛhadāranyaka* and the *Chāndogya Upaniṣads*.
7. Ruben, 'Die Philosophie de Upaniṣads'; Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, The Hague, Mouton, 1965, p. 37; T.G. Goman and R.S. Laura, 'A Logical Treatment of Some Upanisadic Puzzles and Changing Conceptions of Sacrifice', *Numen* 19, no. 1 (1972): 52–67.
8. Romila Thapar, 'The Study of Society' and 'Puranic Lineages and Archaeological Cultures', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1978, pp. 211ff, 240ff.
9. Madhav M. Deshpande and Peter E. Hook (eds), *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1979; Murray B. Emeneau, 'Indian Linguistic Area Revisited', *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics* 3, no. 1 (1974): 93ff.
10. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (hereafter cited as *Ch. Up.*), 4.1.5.1ff.
11. *Ch. Up.*, 4.4.5; *Bṛ. Up.*, 2.4.1ff, 4.5.3.
12. Only the *dvija* could perform the Vedic rituals (*Kātyāyaṇa Śrauta Sūtra*, 1.1.1ff).
13. *Bṛhaddevatā*, 4.11–15, 21–5; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 2.19; *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa*, 12.3.
14. The *vaṃśa*, or succession list, was inflated to give it antiquity. Some of its members are sons, others are pupils, and sometimes the mother's name can provide an identity, as also can the social antecedents of the pupil (*Bṛ. Up.*, 2.6, 4.6. 1ff). The line of teachers often traces itself from the present back to Brahmā.
15. *Bṛ. Up.*, 2.1.2, 3.1.1ff, 4.1.1, 6.2.1.7; *Ch. Up.*, 5.3.1.
16. *Muṇḍaka Up.*, 1.1.4–5.
17. *Bṛ. Up.*, 2.4.5, 4.4.7, 4.5.6ff; *Ch. Up.*, 3.14.1ff.
18. *Bṛ. Up.*, 4.4.13.
19. *Muṇḍaka Up.*, 1.1.5
20. *Ch.Up.*, 1.12.1ff; *Bṛ. Up.*, 1.5.16, 3.9.10–26; *Muṇḍaka Up.*, 1.2.9–13. Attempts have been made by modern scholars to argue that Western scholars and some Indians maintain that the *Upaniṣads* do not support the ritual of sacrifice and the worship of the Vedic deities, but that there are passages in the texts to the contrary. See B.K. Chattopadhyaya, 'Upanisads and Vedic Ritual', in *S. Mookerjee Felicitation Volume*, B.P. Sinha et al. (eds), Varanasi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1969. However, such passages are few and far between.
21. *Ch. Up.*, 5.3.1–7, 5.11.1ff, 5.12.1ff; *Br. Up.*, 2.1.14–15ff, 3.1.1ff.

22. *Bṛ. Up.*, 2.1.15; Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanisads*, London, Clark, 1906; reprint, New York, Dover, 1966, p. 17; Arthur B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanisads*, Harvard Oriental Series, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1925, p. 495.
23. *Bṛ. Up.*, 6.2.8; also *Ch. Up.*, 5.3.7.
24. *Bṛ. Up.*, 3.1.1, 3.9.19; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (hereafter cited as *Śat. Br.*), 1.7.2.8, 3.2.3.15.
25. *Bṛ. Up.*, 3.1.1, 4.3.1ff, 6.2.1; *Ch. Up.*, 5.3.1.
26. Deussen, p. 214.
27. *Br. Up.*, 3.1.1ff.
28. *Mahāśālā mahā śrotriyaḥ*, *Ch. Up.*, 5.11.1ff; cf. *Dīgha Nikāya*, 1.235, Tevijjasutta.
29. *Ch. Up.*, 7.1.2.
30. *Ch. Up.*, 4.1–3.
31. Buddhism, it has been argued, is a radical attack on the *ātmavāda* of the *Upaniṣads*. It opens up a new tradition by opposing theories of the unchanging, eternal soul, which lead to inaction and a refusal to better oneself. T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, 2nd ed., London, Allen & Unwin, 1960; Pratap Chandra, 'Was Early Buddhism Influenced by the Upanisads?' *Philosophy East and West* 21 (1971): 317–24.
32. M. Beard and J. North (eds), *Pagan Priests*, London, Duckworth, 1990.
33. Raymond Firth, 'Offering and Sacrifice: Problems of Organisation', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 93, no. 1 (1963): 12–24.
34. Staal, 'The Meaningless of Ritual'.
35. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W.D. Halls, London, Cohen & West, 1964.
36. *Ch. Up.*, 5.3.7, 5.11.1ff; *Br. Up.*, 2.1.15; *Sat. Br.*, 11.6.2.10.
37. *Ṛg Veda*, 3.21.5; *Śat. Br.*, 3.8.2.26–8; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 7.3.6.
38. *Vasiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra*, 1.45.
39. *Bṛhaddevatā*, 6.92; Romila Thapar, 'Dāna and Dakṣina as Forms of Exchange', in Ancient *Indian Social History: An Interpretation*, pp. 105–21. See chapter 3 in volume III.
40. Yājñavalkya in *Śat. Br.*, 3.1.2.21.
41. B.B. Lal, 'Excavations at Hastinapur and Other Explorations in the Upper Ganga and Satlej Basin', *Ancient India* 10/11 (1954–55): 115. The formula for begetting learned sons involved eating rice cooked with veal or beef together with *ghī*. *Bṛ. Up.*, 6.4.18. One dreads to think of how few cows would survive in contemporary India should this formula have persisted!
42. *Śat. Br.*, 13.2.9.8, 5.1.3.3, 12.7.3.12, 13.2.2.15. Gradually, this status came to include, although to a smaller extent, another category of *yajamānas*, namely, the *gṛhapatis*, or heads of households, who built their resources largely on the lands which they cultivated (*Śat. Br.*, 4.6.8.5).

43. Such as the *agrāyana-iṣṭi*, *cāturmāśa*, *piṇḍapitryajña*, and so on. Even more complex were the *agniṣṭoma*, *agnicāyana* and the *sattras*.
44. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 7.34.
45. *Sat. Br.*, 1.7.3.28, 4.3.4.7; *Pañcavimśa Br.*, 1.8.2ff, 12.8.6; *Bṛ. Up.*, 6.2.7.
46. A.J. Strathern, *The Rope of Moka*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 11.
47. Chris A. Gregory, 'Gifts to Men and Gifts to Gods', *Man* 15 (1980): 626–52, and *Gifts and Commodities*, London, Academic Press, 1982.
48. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 51ff.
49. Thapar, *From Lineage to State*, pp. 88–9.
50. Thapar, *From Lineage to State*. Earlier settlements were of the Painted Grey Ware and the Black-and-Red Ware cultures. The reaching out of the Northern Black Polished Ware, beginning in the seventh/sixth centuries BC, from its provenance between Patna and Varanasi to almost every part of the Ganga plain, suggests contacts, exchange, and increased production as compared to earlier periods. See T.N. Roy, *The Ganges Civilisation*, New Delhi, Ramanand Vidya Bhavan, 1983; R.C. Gaur, *The Excavations at Antranjikhera*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1983; George Erdosy, *Urbanisation in Early Historical India*, BAR International Series, 430, Oxford, B.A.R., 1988.
51. *Bṛ. Up.*, 1.4.11.
52. Romila Thapar, 'Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-Culture?', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*. See chapter 6 in this volume.
53. Thapar, 'Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-Culture?', pp. 63ff, and 'Householders and Renouncers in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Tradition', in *Way of Life*, T.N. Madan (ed.), Delhi, Vikas, 1982, pp. 273ff. See chapter 6 in this volume.
54. Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975.
55. Walter Ruben, 'Schamanismus im alten Indien', *Acta Orientalia* 18 (1940): 164–205.
56. *Ṛg Veda*, 7.22.9, 10.14.15, 10.130, 10.136.
57. *Ch. Up.*, 6.1.1ff.
58. *Bṛ. Up.*, 5.10.
59. Erik af Edholm, 'The Colours of the Soul and the Origin of Karmic Eschatology', in *On the Meaning of Death: Essays on Mortuary Rituals and Eschatological Beliefs*, S. Cederroth, C. Corlin and J. Lindstrom (eds), Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology, no. 8, Uppsala, Univ Acta Univ Uppsaliensis, pp. 95–111.
60. James C. Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Sub-continent*, London, Penguin, 1986, p. 26.
61. *Śat. Br.*, 1.4.1.10ff.

62. Compare K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1963, p. 169.
63. *Ch. Up.*, 6.1ff.
64. *Kaṭha Up.*, 1.1.20–9.
65. *Kaṭha Up.*, 1.3.3.
66. *Bṛ. Up.*, 4.4.3–5; *Ch. Up.*, 5.10.7.
67. *Bṛ. Up.*, 3.2.13, 4.4.1ff; *Ch. Up.*, 5.3–10; *Śat. Br.*, 3.7.4.4.
68. *Bṛ. Up.*, 6.2.15ff; *Ch. Up.*, 4.15.5, 5.10.1ff.
69. *Ch. Up.*, 5.10.3ff. The moon is the lord of seasons, therefore the soul goes beyond the natural rhythms. See Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection*, Albany, N.Y., SUNY Press, 1991. The distinctive symbolism of the sun and the moon was to remain dichotomous in many spheres of Indian thought.
70. *Kaṭha Up.*, 1.1.6.
71. *Ch. Up.*, 5.10.7.
72. *Bṛ. Up.*, 1.4.11, 4.1.1ff.
73. *Ch. Up.*, 5.10.7.
74. Gananath Obeyesekere, 'Theodicy, Sin and Salvation in a Sociology of Buddhism', in Edmund Leach, *Dialectic in Practical Religion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 7–40.
75. Frits Staal, *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, vol. 1, Berkeley, Asian Humanities Press, 1980.
76. This could usefully be compared with the Greek text of Porphyry dating to the third–fourth centuries AD and the discussion of whether animals have souls, a theme and text that were suggested to me by Richard Sorabjee. See Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food*, T. Taylor (trans.), London, Centaur, 1965.
77. *Bṛ. Up.*, 3.3.1.
78. Of the Buddhas who are said to have preceded Gautama, the large majority were *kṣatriyas*.
79. *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 7.8ff. Interestingly, elsewhere the term for a dissenter is *avaidika*.

2

Ideology, Society and the Upaniṣads*

The reconstruction of the social and economic history of early India having become an established facet of the discipline, it is feasible for historians to include in their study the analysis of ideology in early society. There has lately been a debate on the placing of ideology in society. Some have defined it as a superstructure linked to the socio-economic base, as socially determined thought. Others have maintained that it is integrated into the larger whole in a way where, at times, ideology may be a catalyst or at any rate so enmeshed as to make its distinct discernment somewhat problematical. This is not a repetition of the Weber versus Marx debate, since there has been a considerable refinement of the concept of ideology in recent years.[1] For the purposes of this paper it is assumed that ideology is not a pale reflection of reality perched on the summit of the superstructure but (if one is permitted to modify Lukacs) can in certain circumstances become a driving force of history. It also assumes, as argued by Gramsci, that there is such a thing as 'cultural hegemony' where the ideology of a dominant group comes to be accepted by lesser social groups in society, sometimes even without either of them being overtly aware of this. And further, that when there is a lack of fit between ideology and its affiliation to dominant social groups then there is a potential for social change.

This paper attempts to look at the problem with reference to the first millennium BC in a concern with what might be called the watershed situation as reflected in the Upaniṣadic texts,[2] where the centrality of the sacrificial ritual was conceded as an act of society, but at the same time was doubted as the sole means of self-realization. These doubts had an almost logical culmination in a variety of new belief systems and ritual practices, as for example, that of Buddhism. It is not incidental that it arose at this time because with the wavering of the hold of tradition, ideas were opened to challenge and began to compete. It has in the past been argued that these early philosophical speculations spring from the two cultures of the Indo-European and the pre-Aryan Indian.[3] This may to a limited extent be so. But it is incidental to more fundamental social changes which had to do with features not necessarily deriving from either of the two cultures.

The centrality of the sacrificial ritual has tended to be dismissed by historians of this period since it is seen primarily as an articulation of the religious sphere. To sacrifice is to 'make holy'. The word *yajña* from the root *yaj*, to worship, to consecrate, carries the same meaning of converting the profane into the sacred. The process establishes a union between the human and the divine and this in a sense is a forerunner of one of the essentials of Upaniṣadic thought, namely, the link between the human and that which is beyond, the *ātman* and the *brahman*. The sacrificial ritual involves conciliation which is achieved through the death of the victim expiating evil; communion, where eating the victim sanctifies the consumer; and honorific offerings consisting of first fruits and gifts.[4] The Buddhists were contemptuous of the sacrificial ritual as being futile, incapable of providing effective spiritual benefits, cruel to animals and easy to nullify by power acquired through meditation or resort to the miraculous as is said to have been repeatedly demonstrated by the Buddha.[5]

The sacrificial ritual is the central ritual in the Vedic texts. To the extent that this ritual dominated the social activities of people as indicated by the texts, the historian must analyse the social meaning of sacrifice to such a society in order to understand why it became a pivotal concern in the *Upaniṣads*. Given the absence of burials in the cultures of the Ganga plain, the utilization of wealth concentrated on the ritual of sacrifice. Such wealth was also tied to the notion of status. The ritual therefore is at one level a religious expression, at another the statement of status on the part of the *yajamāna*, and at a third level, a demonstration of wealth and resources.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* contains an elaborate description of the various sacrificial rituals. Among these are the shorter seasonal rituals such as the *āgrāyaṇa iṣṭi* (offerings of the first fruits), *darśapūrṇamāsa iṣṭi, cāturmāsyāni, piṇḍapitṛyajña*; the special *soma* sacrifices of which the *agniṣṭoma* is often mentioned in other sources; the long rituals for prosperity such as the *agnicayana* and various *sattras*; funeral rituals; the *pravargya* sacrifices and the elaborate 'royal sacrifices' where the *yajamāna* was the *rājā* and the ritual had to do with his consecration, conquest and claim over territory and rejuvenation as in the *abhiṣecanīya*, *rājasūya*, *aśvamedha* and *vājapeya* rituals which intermittently lasted for a period of years.

The ritual involves the death of a living being either actually or symbolically and includes gift offerings, consecration and sacred food and drink. Sacrifice means the surrender of something valuable but in the expectation of greater gain. The individual and the community value that which is given up. If it is livestock then the expectation is that of greater fertility of the herd and this in turn meant greater numbers and therefore prosperity. The sacrificial ritual was also a rite through which there was a communication with gods and spirits. The status of the participants was also underlined through the ritual. The group periodically renews the sentiment which it has of itself and of its unity. It hinges on notions of power, force, energy in the philosophy of such cultures. There is therefore a multiplicity of ideas involved in the ritual.

The killing of the sacrificial victim required a special preparation. A location had to be purified and cordoned off since to kill outside this area was tantamount to murder. Within this space was the sacred enclosure, the *vedi*. The killing of the victim should not in any way act adversely on the *yajamāna* so that in the process of sacralization a start was made with the *yajamāna*.[6] One of the methods of purification was fasting, the *upavasatha*, which combined fasting in the proximity of the area where the sacrificial fire was lit.[7] Fasting and asceticism were equivalent in some cases to a sacrificial ritual. Thus the germ of the change was contained in this sentiment. Added to this was the element of renunciation in the giving up of a victim or an offering. The period of purification being long it would exclude those who were essential to the daily activities of life and would require that only those who could set apart these activities or find substitutes for their activities, were eligible to be *yajamānas*. This together with the resources required for the ritual meant that only those with some wealth at their command could be *yajamānas*. At the conclusion of the rite the consuming of the sacrificial victim was shared by the deities, priests and the *yajamāna*, once again setting these social categories apart.[8] The picking out of these essentials of the sacrificial ritual but placing them in a different context was characteristic of groups such as the Buddhists. The *uposatha/upavasatha* for the Buddhists was not the eve of the *soma* sacrifice but the first, eighth, fifteenth and twenty-third nights of the lunar month. On the fifteenth, the *dhamma* was expounded, the *pātimokkha* was recited and the *sila* vows were taken, the ritual of sacrifice being replaced by a different emphasis on restraint and ethical behaviour.[9]

The sacrificial ritual has also been described as a part of the gift-exchange system.[10] The distinction between an offering which may not be the same as an act of giving is suggested in the terms used in relation to Vedic sacrifices. The offering or the oblation is the *bali* deriving perhaps from the roots *bhṛ* or *hṛ* and meaning, 'to bear' or 'to carry'. *Dāna*, on the other hand, is specifically the act of giving. It has been argued that even an offering is a species of gift because it is personal to the giver and is valued by him.[11] Whereas this is true of *dāna* it is not necessarily true of *bali*. The element of exchange is often absent in an offering whereas it is intrinsic to a gift. An offering, where it is a gift, implies an asymmetrical status relationship. Even if *bali* as an offering does not conform strictly to the role of a gift in a gift-exchange system, the *dāna* which was bestowed on the priests by the *rājā* would have functioned in this manner.[12] Thus there is a touch of renunciation involved in the giving up of something precious to be used in the ritual. The nature and the quality of renunciation changes in the subsequent period when there are a number of shifts in emphases. The notion of gift-exchange is also introduced into the ritual. Buddhism however emphasizes the importance of *dāna* directly. The giving is at some cost to the giver because normally what is given is a scarce resource which has alternative uses.[13] Thus the number of sacrificial rituals may be determined by the availability of such resources. The logic of the latter argument may indicate one of the reasons for lengthy rituals with an ample use of dairy produce but with a smaller destruction of livestock. It has been suggested that Buddhist hostility to animal sacrifice may have had to do with the decline of herding in the middle Ganga plain.[14]

The availability of resources affects attitudes towards the offering. In herding communities, and particularly among cattle herders, animals are not indiscriminately killed for food. There is often a prohibition on the eating of such animals and the occasions for eating the flesh of these is specially marked out.[15] The eating of the meat of a particular animal is generally limited to the occasion of a sacrifice when the animal is offered as a victim, unless of course the animal dies a natural death after which it may be eaten. This was one way of conserving the herd. Vedic texts maintain that after the victim has been sacrificed, even if it be of the cattle family, its flesh can be eaten. There is the oft-quoted passage in which

Yājñavalkya lists his preferences for tender cuts of beef.[16] Similar meat is served to honoured guests, the term *go-ghna*, the one for whom the cow is killed, being used for special guests.[17] In a cattle-herding society this was part of the notion of a gift, the assumption being that one would receive the same in return on a visit to the home of the guest, apart from the host being lauded as both generous and of noble status. That there was not a total prohibition on the eating of beef, but that it is specifically mentioned in the context of special occasions would suggest that the cow was valuable and therefore inviolate and not sacred and therefore inviolate.[18] The conservation of the herd required that a prohibition be placed on the indiscriminate killing of cattle for food which prohibition was sought to be strengthened through giving it a sacred sanction. There is a difference between an offering that can be destroyed and one that can be reserved and eaten after the sacrificial ritual has been completed. Thus *ghī* and milk were destroyed, the *ghī* being burnt in some of the more dramatic rites such as the *vasordhārā*.[19] Animals of the edible kind were consumed after the ritual. That the conventions regarding cattle were not widely observed is evident from the remains at excavated sites. Cattle bones with marks indicating that the meat had been cut with knives or some sharp instrument are often found in the vicinity of hearths at Painted Grey Ware sites[20] (the archaeological culture generally equated with the later Vedic corpus). The incidence of such bones would suggest a higher consumption of beef than that available only from sacrificial rituals or the feasting of guests.

The gradual decline of a cattle economy as is suggested in the later Vedic corpus meant the decrease in raids and skirmishes; hostilities developed into warfare on a larger scale with calculated violence. The synonymity of a warrior with the *rājā* gradually gave way to the *rājā* being associated with the management of land where agriculture superceded cattle herding. The *kṣatriya* became the one who had access to land. To continue to translate the term as 'warrior' and attribute the characteristics of the warrior as the primary characteristics of the *kṣatriya* fails to take account of a fundamental change in the ethos of *kṣatriya* society. The management of agricultural resources required not only the propitiation of a different set of deities but also a new ethic in which violence was to be subordinated. The emphasis on *ahiṃsā* was appropriate to this change. Agricultural resources could not be increased through 'capturing' land, but through using labour on land and through investing wealth in land. The greater the investment of labour and wealth, the larger the return.

The social distancing of potential groups as labour had to be created and socially legitimized. The return to a myth of origin involving a primeval sacrifice was used as early as in the *puruṣasūkta* hymn but the outcome of the sacrifice was the assertion of a social hierarchy.[21] The functions associated with the four *varṇas* reflected the social distinction and reinforced it with a religious sanction.

Wealth had also to be accumulated if it was to be invested in the new resource of cultivated land. In the potlatch there is no capital accumulation. Wealth is distributed and although in each case a larger amount is given the increase is not regarded as an interest on the original but as a larger gift.[22] The objection to the sacrificial ritual when reiterated by an institution such as the *saṅgha* is conditioned by the attempt to control or receive gifts. *Dāna* is collected for the *saṅgha* and those that make the maximum donations are important to the *saṅgha* and are remembered in the texts, as was Jīvaka.[23] Gifts to an institution can play the role of commodities. Although the gift is not returned to the donor and only intangible merit—*puṇya*—is returned, the institution can use the gift as a source to be invested in its establishment.

When the means of subsistence was cattle and the productive group was the herding clan led by *rājanya/kṣatriya* warriors, the sacrificial ritual remained central. When the means of subsistence changed increasingly to land and agriculture with cultivators and eventually peasants as the productive groups organized around landowning clans and later landowning families, the centrality of the sacrificial ritual began to recede. However, since it articulated more than just a religious expression, it began to be replaced by many new aspects of social activity and religious articulation. In looking at the underlying features of exchange in society during the transition in the mid-first millennium BC in the Ganga plain, there is a move from a system drawing heavily on gift exchange to one which gradually establishes a redistributive structure to which is added an incipient market exchange. These changes were by no means divorced from those in speculative and religious thought.

Society as depicted in Vedic texts of the earlier part of the first millennium BC was characterized by *viś* and *rājanyas*.[24] Being primarily pastoral with a gradual change to agriculture, cattle-raiding and booty-capturing were major preoccupations. The superior lineages of the *rājanyas* who were eventually to become the landowning elite increased their domination over the lesser lineages of the *viś*, who, through a system of prestations provided whatever wealth was unobtainable from booty and after the change to agriculture came to be the main support of the *kṣatriya*. Social distancing encouraged the crystallization of at least three systems of kinship and descent: *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, and those who were still lower, the *śūdras*. Each group performed services for the other and a hierarchy based on such services was evolved.

A successful raid encouraged the holding of a sacrificial ritual which would be hosted by the *kṣatriya yajamāna* (sacrifiant) and at which the *brāhmaṇa* priests ranging over many categories and each specializing in some aspect of the ritual, would act as intermediaries between the *yajamāna* and the gods, particularly those gods invoked at the ritual. The sacrifice was a prayer for fertility, victories, wealth (computed in cows, horses, chariots, and gold) and general well-being. Elements of earlier shamanism were retained in the ritual: the altar was often in the shape of an eagle; pebbles and stones with natural holes and cavities were essential and the sound of the *mantra* or verse carried its own magical power.[25] The Vedic sacrifice was thus not a parallel to the Semitic covenant between a man and his God.

The sacrificial ritual had more than a religious purpose. A spectacular ritual, extending over many days or even months added fame and glory to the *yajamāna* for, the greater the amount of wealth expended the higher would be the status of the *yajamāna*. In the mutual dependence of the *kṣatriya* and the *brāhmaṇa* the former acquired status and the latter wealth, for each such occasion ended with gift-giving to the priests in the form of tangible wealth. When the *kṣatriya* increased his authority and was regarded as a king rather than a mere chief, this dependence also increased. The *brāhmaṇa* now associated the *kṣatriya* with divinity thus enhancing his legitimacy to rule and in return the *brāhmaṇa* came to possess even greater wealth. The major source of the *ksatriya's* wealth was now from the *viś* in the form of first fruits of the harvest and larger ritual prestations, described metaphorically as the *kṣatriya* eating the *viś*.[26]

The sacrificial ritual therefore was to become a major point of controversy in the germination of new ideas as suggested by the evidence of the *Upaniṣads*. It would seem from these texts that a small proportion of the *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas* came to think about mortality and immortality—a question which also motivated the sacrificial ritual. The efficacy of the ritual as a means to individual's release from rebirth gradually came to be regarded as inadequate and was not the primary concern of the sacrificial ritual. *Mokṣa* becomes important in relation to the centrality of the concept of the *ātman* and of rebirth. It lies ensconced in a shift emphasizing the centrality of the individual. This is given further stress by the association of *prāṇa* or breath with the *ātman*. What might be described as the Upaniṣadic breakthrough was developed by a small group who introduced the notion of the individual soul (*ātman*) seeking union with the universal soul (*brahman*) which was seen as the eventual form of liberation or *mokṣa*. *Ātman* is variously derived from the roots *an*–to breathe, *at*–to move, *va*–to blow, all suggestive characteristics of life and the individual self. *Brahman* from the root *bṛih*, expanding and evolving, is suggestive of that which is all-inclusive and which led perhaps to the notion of a universality which is both the source and the destination of the individual soul, an idea not alien to those who saw both time and life as cyclic. Etymologically *brahman* has also been associated with power and magic—an association which may well have had its roots in shamanist sources. As to the definition of the *ātman* and *brahman* there is a continuous bipolarity. The *ātman* can be larger than the entire world but it can also be smaller than a mustard seed or a grain of rice.[27] It remains therefore an abstraction. Release from rebirth, it was argued, could be achieved better through *yoga* (bodily control) and *dhyāna* (meditation) than by the sacrificial ritual. An initial groping towards metempsychosis and the idea of the rebirth of the soul in another body and in accordance with the merits and otherwise of one's present existence (which was to develop into the theory of *karma* and *saṃsāra*) is also discernible although in a seminal form. The fuller discussion of this in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, describes Yama, the god of death, in dialogue with Naciketas and the central question posed is that of *punar-mṛtyu* (the cycle of deaths) and curiously not of *punar-janma* (the cycle of births). The latter was to become the more frequent term in later texts. Conquest over death or over the repetition of deaths and its counterpart, immortality, provides a subtler difference in concern than does the idea of the termination of rebirth. The questioning of the sacrificial ritual and its replacement by *yoga* and *dhyāna* as well as by the secret doctrine[28] (as it is described in the texts) of the *ātman* and the *brahman*, has its own historical value given the role of the ritual in social and economic processes.

That it was a secret doctrine communicated only to the trusted few has its own interest. *Iti rahasyam iti upaniṣad*, suggests confidentiality. The element of secrecy is said to have emerged from the secret explanations of the ritual which are discussed in the *Āraṇyakas* and which grew independently of the ritual. These were the more speculative exercises and were doubtless germinal to the ideas of the *Upaniṣads*. Explicatory manuals were required possibly because of the incorporation of new rituals through the assimilation of new ethnic communities, where these rituals would have to be adjusted to the existing ones. New ideas may well have arisen in the course of such explanations. These would tend to be tied to the rituals until such time as the rituals were either gradually discarded or were openly refuted. Secrecy raises the curiosity of others once they suspect it but, above all, it binds those who are a party to the secret and perhaps encourages a feeling of superiority: they know that which others do not. The emphasis on secrecy also points to some apprehension regarding its widespread knowledge. This may have had something to do with its authors. These consisted of a few *kṣatriyas*, some from the fringe areas of the *āryāvarta*, areas where the sacrificial ritual had declined and which were therefore described in Vedic literature as 'impure lands' (*mleccha-deśa*) .[29] But the *ksatriyas* of these areas, it would seem, discoursed on this doctrine and taught it to a few selected *brāhmaṇas*. The more frequently mentioned of these *kṣatriyas* are Pravāhana Jaivali of the Pañcālas, Aśvapati Kaikeya, Hiranya-nābha of Kosala, Ajātaśatru of Kāśī and Janaka of Videha.[30] These *kṣatriyas* are described as teaching the *brāhmaṇas*, and one of the early *Upaniṣads* states that Ajātaśatru commenting on this says, that it is contrary to the usual procedure where the *brāhmaṇa* teaches the *kṣatriya*.[31] Possibly it was embarrassing to the *brāhmaṇas* in the early stages of the new doctrines to openly consider alternatives to the sacrificial ritual. The decline of the sacrificial ritual may have been due to the existence of other cults, such as the worship of ancestral tumuli and sacred enclosures and trees and the *stūpa* and *caitya* cults, some of which may have been earlier than the Vedic sacrificial ritual in these areas.

These *kṣatriyas* although not antagonistic to the sacrificial ritual were probably not too eager to enforce it. This may have derived from a questioning of the ritual but also secondarily from other considerations. The mutual dependence of the *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣatriyas* for power and status could be broken if the sacrificial ritual was discontinued. The reality of power came increasingly to be recognized as lying in access to resources and in some schools of thought the bestowal of divine attributes became more marginal. In any case wealth was necessary to obtaining legitimacy. However since wealth was consumed in the ritual and in gift-giving to the *brāhmaṇas*, the power of the *kṣatriya* was circumscribed. A direct assertion through controlling resources would be one way of conserving power. The 'impure lands' were located either in northwestern India where major trade routes were to develop, or else in the middle Ganga plain. Claims to landownership on the part of the *kṣatriya* families and the use of slaves and hired labour to work the land increased the resources at their command permitting accumulation of wealth and sharpening the stratification. Wealth, if it was not to be destroyed in the sacrificial ritual would be a realistic basis for actual power. The temptation to break away from the prestation economy would have been apparent. It is interesting that the new doctrine places a different emphasis on the *kṣatriya*. He is no longer the warrior boasting of heroic deeds and awaiting the heaven of Indra, for he is now also the owner of land, the weilder of power, asserting himself in a new role. The *kṣatriya* identity cut across geographical regions as also did the *kṣatriya* doctrine and its teachers who belonged as much to the Kekaya clan of the north-west as to the Videha of the middle Ganga plain.

The two social categories involved in the reciprocal relationship of the sacrificial ritual were the *kṣatriyas* and the *brāhmaṇas*. Uncertainty in the initial ranking of each in relation to the other and the interdependence of the two is clearly stated.[32] It is the same two who are now involved in the new doctrine. Thus, the control of what was to emanate from the new doctrine was monopolized by those who had earlier controlled the sacrifice. Janaka of Videha asks Yājñavalkya, when the latter comes to see him, whether he has come to obtain cattle or join in a discussion, to which Yājñavalkya replies that he has come for both purposes.[33] However, since the secret doctrine did not require a ritual which requisitioned resources, the relation of reciprocity was eroded. The boundaries of reciprocity as a system of exchange and control could not continue once the system began to change. If the analogy can be carried further (without sounding facetious) the subsequent redistributive economy found its ideological parallel in the transformation of the secret doctrine into a universal belief system and in the institutionalizing of its rituals in the form of a variety of *saṅghas*.

That some *brāhmaṇas* too were participants in these new doctrines requires an explanation. Some among them who go to the *kṣatriyas* to learn the new doctrine are described as *mahāśālā mahāśrotrīya* (the extremely wealthy and very learned).[34] Elsewhere *mahāśālā* is the epithet for *brāhmaṇas* who owned large acreages of cultivated land which they had received as gifts for the performance of major sacrifices, land having now become a category of wealth.[35] Were these *brāhmaṇas* also anxious to conserve their wealth which otherwise they would be expected to expend on *soma* sacrifices? Or does one look for a less mundane, even if partial, explanation? That there were some who doubted the efficacy of the ritual is evident from the earlier texts.[36] But such doubts were marginal at that time. Now they seem to have become more central. Part of the answer may lie in the early texts being aimed at propitiating the gods, whereas now the aim was to comprehend reality—a distinctly different activity. However, not all the *brāhmaṇas* interested in the new doctrine were *mahāśālā*, some were those who had set up hermitages in the forests, where, surrounded by their disciples, their concern was to try and unfathom the nature of reality, and of mortality and immortality. Not that such *brāhmaṇas* were averse to wealth.[37] The fees that were charged for teaching the new doctrine could be substantial and reference is made to gifts of upto a thousand cows, gold, horses, *dāsīs*, chariots, elephants, and land. Nevertheless, there were others who received pupils and taught them free of a fee and passed on their knowledge to them if they felt that the disciple was capable of comprehending it. The latter were among the early groups who opted out of society and sought a distance from social concerns. Their predecessors were the *munis* and *ṛṣis*.

The *munis* not only broke away from social obligations but also claimed extraordinary powers. They too are referred to as the long haired ones flying through the air, suggestive of shamans.[38] Elements of shamanism are reinforced in the new doctrine. An early text refers to the soul remaining in plants.[39] In the *Upaniṣads* the soul is described as going through the air which opens out like the hole in the chariot wheel and then it goes to the sun and the moon which open out like apertures in musical instruments.[40] In another passage the soul travels through space, air, cloud, rain, crops and finally lodges in plants where it is eaten and thus reborn,[41] reminiscent of shamanic descriptions of the journeying of the soul. It is interesting that the cycle is an agricultural one. As a shamanistic group they were the forerunners of the renouncers and ascetics. Their techniques involved the demonstration of bodily and mental powers and their theories were in part concerned with the voyaging of the soul. The notion of *brahman* also carries a shamanic trace inasmuch as it is associated with *brahma*, a magical power, equated by some with *mana*. The sheer secrecy of the doctrine handed down from the teacher to a specially selected pupil and not revealed publicly and the fact that it derives from knowledge obtained through the human senses, by intuition, bodily control and meditation, is suggestive of shamanistic techniques. To this may be added other characteristics: the lengthy period of training, fasting and solitude, the need to have a teacher who initiates and guides the acolyte, not to mention the ultimate goal of the soul entering into communion with the divine. The description of the journey to the world of Brahmā is a complex picture of many heavens and crossings involving deities, which is evidently an attempt to reconcile the notion of heaven with the abstract notion of *brahman*, but carries in the description the influence of shamanism.

The social context of the new doctrine is again different from that of sacrifice: whereas the sacrifice required not only the presence of the clan but also the participation of the clan, be it the priests performing the ritual, or the *rājās* as *yajamānas* or the *viś* who brought the prestations, the new doctrine required a distance from social obligations whether of family or of clan. The emphasis shifted dramatically from the clan to the individual, a shift which was symptomatic of some of the anomie of changing social relations. The soul was that of the individual and *mokṣa* was an individual concern. The term *ātman* in itself encapsulates individuality.[42] The sacrifice could not be conducted in the absence of the clan: the comprehension of the *ātman-brahman* relationship was impossible in the presence of the clan, since it grew out of *yoga* and *dhyāna*.[43] It required neither intermediaries nor deities. The uncertainty of one's status after rebirth was in itself a departure from a hierarchical view of the future. The distancing from social obligation is also evident in the implied irrelevance of *varṇa* status in the new doctrine. The story of Satyākama who, wishing to become a disciple of a teacher is asked to identify his caste, replies truthfully that he does not know who his father was and his mother was of low caste.[44] He is accepted. Even if it is argued that the fact of his speaking truthfully is taken as an indication of high caste, nevertheless he was born low by the rules of *varṇa* and should have been treated as of a low caste. The caste of the individual, it was implied, was unimportant in the search for salvation. It is not status that is crucial to immortality or rebirth, but one's actions. There is here again a germinal idea towards a universal ethic which was to be taken up by later teachers. But this germinal idea also prevented the notion of negating caste in daily life: the negation only applied to those who lived in hermitages at a distance from society.

These speculations inevitably had an impact on theories of knowledge. Not only was knowledge more important than ritual but it had its own reward, such as the discovery of the concept of immortality.[45] The introduction of doubt and investigation was a departure from the sacrificial tradition which was obsessed with the correct interpretation of ritual actions in a form which hardly encouraged wide-ranging speculations. The new theories on *punar-mṛtyu* and *ātman-brahman* grew out of a process of reasoning and were explained through a series of empirical similarities and analyses.[46] The debate on logic (*vākovākya*) did have its origins in sacrificial ritual but was extended via the new theories which came to refer to it as *tarkaśāstra*. These new techniques travelled long distances carried by the *carakas* and *parivrājakas*, terms earlier associated with pastoral nomads but now with the wandering teachers going from one settlement to another, and who were met with even more frequently in the parks and groves on the edges of the new urban centres. The repeated reference to groves makes one wonder whether some of the mysticism involved in the worship of sacred groves did not find its way into Upaniṣadic thought. It is unlikely that those who founded major schools of new thinking were unfamiliar with many of these ideas. The later *Maitri Upaniṣad*,[47] in a spirit quite alien to the earlier *Upaniṣads*, castigates these teachers as a hindrance to knowledge, presumably referring to their complete openness to question and to analyse. It includes them together with the *śūdra* teachers and those who wore the red robe and who attack the *Vedas* through juggling false arguments. It adds sternly that a *brāhmaṇa* should not study what is not included in the *Vedas*! This heralded the coming of heterodoxy.

Among the major sects associated with the emergence of heterodoxy was the one founded by the Buddha. It has been argued that some Buddhist doctrine grew out of seminal ideas from the *Upaniṣads*.[48] This is in part true, but this argument is also an attempt to trace all philosophical and ethical traditions back to the *Upaniṣads* as a mechanism of appropriating heterodoxy should it become necessary. Significantly the Buddha does refer to these earlier teachers but is equally clear that his teaching is a departure from them. The nature of the difference can be seen from a few ideas. Thus the *Upaniṣads* speak of the importance of *kāma* or desire which ties a person to the world.[49] The *Upaniṣad* maintains that the attainment of *brahman* helps to transcend hunger, thirst, sorrow, old age and death.[50] Renunciation according to the *Upaniṣads* is the means of overcoming sorrow and attaining *brahman*.[51] When a person dies his *karma* controls his new existence. The texts speak of two kinds of knowledge, that which is based on knowing (*vijñāna*) and that which is intuitive (*prajñā*).[52] Equally significant is the notion of the seeker having to overcome temptation. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, Naciketas has a dialogue with Yama, the god of death, who offers attractive alternatives to the former's search for salvation, but ultimately concedes to the wish of Naciketas and reveals to him the doctrine of *brahman*.

These points of seeming similarity should not however detract from the fact that the Buddha was not merely following through some ideas of the *Upaniṣads* but even where this may seem so, he was transforming them. The Buddha also speaks of desire as the cause of sorrow, but uses the term *tṛṣṇā* which carries a starker meaning of thirst, with an emphasis on the longing for or grasping towards the quenching of thirst, rather than the more ambiguous *kāma*. Hunger, disease, old age and death are familiar to us from the biography of the Buddha which are said to have led him to question the permanence of life. The Buddha, prior to his enlightenment, has a dialogue with Māra, the personification of evil, and refuses the temptations.[53] The god of death is of course the more powerful image but in a system without deities, as was the Buddhist, a deity could not be a teacher and knowledge has ultimately to be discovered by the individual. Naciketas's concern with what happens after the great departure is common to both him and the Buddha. *Tṛṣṇā* (desire) became the central cause of suffering and the elimination of desire the focus of ethical and behavioural norms. The analysis of ethics was in the context of human action with logic, rationality and intuition as major elements of analysis. Central to Buddhist thinking was the emphasis on causality. To this was linked the doctrine of *karma* and the next life. The early *Upaniṣads* are not consistent in their view of the soul after death. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* speaks of the *devayāna* or the path of light and the *pitṛyāna*, the path of darkness: whereas in the former there is no rebirth, in the case of the latter, the soul is reborn after a period.[54] The *Kauṣītakī* has a variation on this. It states that all souls go to the *pitṛyāna* from where some move permanently to the *devayāna* and others are reborn.[55] The link between desire and rebirth is expressed more clearly in a later *Upaniṣad*, the *Muṇḍaka*.[56] To the Buddha, transcendental concerns, as e.g. the path to *nirvāṇa*, were also viewed as systems explaining social action and human destiny. However, even the quest for salvation is not the acceptance of the arbitrariness of human actions and social arrangements, but the conscious outcome of these on the basis of human choice. The doctrine of causation was to become central to the teaching of many sects at this time.

Schools of thought evolve from earlier systems. Buddhism was a heterodoxy because it took the structure of the earlier system but gave it a new focus. It is not therefore confined to the boundaries and framework of Vedic and Upanisadic thought. It not only goes beyond but changes the paradigm. If the *Upaniṣads* mark a watershed between the ideologies of Vedic Brahmanism on the one hand and the 'heterodoxies' on the other and draw upon the concerns of certain categories of *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas*, Buddhist ideology changes the paradigm to focus on the concerns of the *gahapatis* and *seṭṭhis*. It abolishes the notion of a secret doctrine and universalizes its teaching.

The growth of Buddhist heterodoxy has to be seen in the various other contexts, the most radical of which have come to be called the doctrines of the Lokāyata. In the Buddhist texts, it is explained as the science of casuistry in which logic was central.[57] This kind of discourse perhaps had its origin in the riddles posed in the course of the sacrifice, since the structure of riddles derives from an abstraction of logic and questions were often put in the form of riddles in the texts under discussion. As such, the technique was not characteristic of heterodox methods of argument and grew within the Vedic practice. However, it was taken over and developed into an intellectual method. Some sects underlined empiricism as the sole source of knowledge, and argued that the soul does not exist since it cannot be perceived or felt, that there is little merit in religious practices and that the only source of knowledge is sense perception. This reduced the importance of inference. The authority of the *Vedas* was denounced as being tainted by untruth, self-contradiction and tautology.[58] These views did make an impact on Buddhist thinking, although by and large the Buddha was contemptuous of these sects. Logic was important to such debates. This was an early occasion when analytical categories were introduced and used in discourse as well as being applied to the comprehension of social reality. Such debates were joined by *brāhmaṇas* as well as *non-brāhmaṇas*. Similar categories of thought were applied to disciplines other than philosophical discourse as is evident from the first grammar of Sanskrit composed by Pāṇini. Within the tradition of analysing language, the form of debate which came to be preferred, *pūrva-pakṣa prati-pakṣa, siddhanta* carries something of a dialectical flavour.

An important notion common to many of these sects was that the analysis of social action or metaphysical beliefs required a distancing from society and ultimately the path to liberation lay through renunciation.

This too germinates from the Vedic concept of *tyāga* or separation, abandonment, resignation. The freeing was both from society and the body. Renunciation for those who followed the precepts of the *Dharmasūtras* was of course very different from what it was for those who were Nirgranthas or were Buddhists. Brahmanism supported the notion of the four *āśramas* where any form of renunciation was subsequent to a socially productive life. For others it had the reverse effect of withdrawing from social obligations. For the Buddhists, this led to the dichotomy of preaching to two categories, the *gṛhastha* or the householders who were embedded in society and the *tyāgin* or *parivrājaka* who had renounced their social obligations. The mundane and the transcendental of a different order were thus separated. But unlike the ascetics who were symbolically dead to society and attempted to reduce their dependence on the physical body by mortification, the Buddhist renouncers were to become a parallel or alternative society and were made part of the scheme of things through the argument that they were assisting the *gṛhastha* towards liberation. The contradiction lay in the fact that although the societal order was seen as inferior and incomplete, its continuance and its very incompleteness was necessary for the existence and justification of the renouncers.

The degree to which the Buddhists and other sects were heterodox becomes evident from both their doctrines as well as their social role. If dissent is a characteristic of heterodoxy then there is evidence for it. The Buddhists had a firm doctrinal position in which Vedic theories and practices were either discarded or at least questioned. Even the less orthodox theories of the earlier *Upaniṣads* were merely the starting point for a well-articulated and distinct ideological position. The relationship between the *brāhmaṇas* and the *śramaṇas* was to be characterized later as that between the snake and the mongoose, the cat and the mouse, the venom of opposition being instinctive.[59] Even more significant was the physical form which the Buddhist, Jaina, Ājīvika and some other sects were to take, where, from the start their identity was based on clustering around particular teachers and then building an order (*saṅgha*) and institution around this identity. The differentiation was sharp and clear both between the order and the rest of society as well as between the orders; a differentiation which was to lead to the segmenting off of sects from the main stem on issues involving precisely these questions of identity and doctrinal differences. The institutionalizing of the sects and the competition among them for acceptance encouraged in them both historiographical thinking as well as missionary activities.

The social hinterland of these sects was not immune to these changes and the degree to which they were accepted is also indicative of changed social conditions. Religion as an embedded feature was not prised loose but nevertheless the shift from revelation to analysis did suggest new modes for religious thought. Religious practice did not dominate ethics but ethical emphasis did pervade the concept of social norms. Earlier practices were given a new orientation as is exemplified in the concept of *dāna* and *puṇya*. *Dāna* was gift-giving, what was earlier given at the sacrificial ritual and was now given to the *saṅgha* or the order of the sect; *puṇya* was the merit which accrued from such actions and which contributed towards the donor's proximity to *nirvāṇa*. Prestations were neither prescribed nor hierarchically ordered; they could be a gift from anyone and the merit so accumulated was part of the balance between the individual and the accumulation of merit *vis-à-vis nirvāṇa*, allowing for the fact that *dāna* constituted only one element in the building up of *puṇya*. The essence of religion had begun to change. It was less the ritual act and more the individual concern with release from rebirth, at least in theory. In practice the ritual acts were not altogether forsaken but less meticulously observed. The grander rituals were often performed for reasons of legitimation as was the case with *rājās*. The prestations however were now marginal to the access to economic resources since the economy itself had been transformed from the days of pastoralism mixed with agriculture in the western Ganga plain.

Legitimizing the *rājā* which was a crucial function of the major sacrifices of the Vedic texts was not discontinued, although it became less frequent. The same function was also performed by the Buddhist *saṅgha* in accepting royal patronage and grants. The alternate function of the *rājā* ordering the sacrifice and therefore becoming the initiator of religious action was sought to be paralleled by the insistence in Buddhist historiography on associating kings with the calling of the various Buddhist Councils where doctrinal differences were sorted out. Thus Ajātaśatru of Magadha is associated with the calling of the First Council of Rājagṛha soon after the Buddha's death and Aśoka Maurya with the Third Council at Pāṭaliputra when the pre-eminence of the dominant Sthaviravāda sect was established. The *saṅgha* was thus both above and beyond secular society yet at the same time closely linked to it. What is significant is not the continuity of the religious connection with the political but the change in the nature of the link. The *saṅgha* could be independent of royal patronage or could, if it wanted greater social control, work through royal patronage. The political order as the central locus of mundane society was not regarded as exclusive, for the ideal king as defined by Buddhism was the *cakkavattin/cakravartin*, the just king who rules in accordance with the *Dhamma* or the ethical system as developed by Buddhist thinking.[60] It was not accountability to a higher authority as much as accordance with a higher ethic which governed the making of a *cakkavattin*. The accountability is in any case to society, for kingship according to Buddhist theory evolved out of a situation of disharmony where one person, the *māhāsammatta*, was elected to maintain order. This theory of the origin of kingship presupposes a number of persons in competition and conflict and the need for defining a hierarchy. This may well have been a reflection of competing elites at this time.

The activity of the new sects is also indicative of new social groups. Not only did these ideologies often reinforce the *kṣatriyas* as an alternative focus of power to the *brāhmaṇa* with material wealth in the form of landownership but also provided the backing of an ideology emphasizing the transcendental in a manner which appealed even to some *brāhmaṇas*. This was as it were a logical outcome of the direction taken by the *Upaniṣads*. But the appeal also extended elsewhere and included an entirely new social group, that of the merchants and traders who were essential to the towns of this time. The social genesis of these groups appears to have been in the landowning families for it was from these *gahapatis* or householders that there emerged the *seṭṭhigahapatis*, later to become the families of bankers, financiers and traders. In a later period, it was these groups which formed the hard core among the patrons of Buddhism and Jainism, apart from royalty. By the Mauryan period, therefore, the range of elites extended from *brāhmaṇas* to *kṣatriyas* to *seṭṭhis*. In terms of economic classes, the landowning *gahapatis* (which included some *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas*) and the commercial *seṭṭhis* were clearly dominant. Implicit in this diversification was the idea that there was also a range of ideologies. The political elites remained the landowning groups but could now be drawn from *kṣatriya*, *brāhmaṇa* and even (if *brāhmaṇa* sources are to be believed) from the *śūdra varṇa*. Thus the Nanda and Maurya dynasties are described as being of *śūdra* origin in the Purāṇic dynastic lists. It is however possible that this was intended more as a remark of contempt for dynasties supportive of the new sects rather than as a statement of authenticated social origins.

The existence of new elites has at one level to do with the social and economic changes evident in the middle Ganga plain as compared to the Vedic heartland to the west. The pastoral-agrarian economy of the latter with a premium on the cultivation of wheat and barley and substantially by villages with few clusters of densely populated centres presented a rather different social landscape from that of the eastern area. Here the introduction of wet rice cultivation resulted in a new pattern of settlement. The emphasis was on large areas of land under cultivation, to the decrease of pastoralism, given the marshlands of north Bihar. Wet rice cultivation and irrigation meant intensive labour controlled by entrepreneurs requiring initially the clearing of the monsoon forest in which the use of new technologies adapted to agriculture were introduced. Once the mechanics were under control then the produce was so substantial that it did open up the possibility of other developments such as incipient trade. The latter used the network of geographically located nodal points connected by the river system of the Ganga plain to evolve into complex circuits of exchange. These changes were not unconnected with the other changes discussed earlier in this paper and an interlinking is necessary although not of a mechanical kind.

The earlier society seems to have expanded less through aggression and more through migration. Cattle raids did give some power over a neighbouring area but this tended to be parochial. The migration and settlement of a segment of a tribe was a more effective way of extending the control of a lineage and this was practised in many areas. With the establishment of the monarchical state raids and migrations gave way to annexation and consolidation of annexed territory. This was necessary in a situation where revenue was beginning to be systematically collected and territorial control provided access to power. The endorsement of the concept of non-violence however militated against aggrandizement and to that extent could act as a theoretical check on untrammeled state power.

There are two evident features in this discussion which need to be reiterated. One is the transformation of earlier traditions into later forms, which change not only in the new context but also in the new network of relations. The second is the attempt of universalizing the ideology and moving away from the ethic of groups and castes to that of society *per se*. This is partly expressed in the marginalizing of *varṇa* functions in some sects and their elimination in the teachings of the Lokāyata sects. Whereas caste *as jāti* remains important in defining marriage and kinship, the actual status of *varṇa* become less significant in the new theories. Social differentiation moves in the direction of economic and professional distinctions in terms of access to resources. Thus the dichotomy between the *gahapati* (householder) and the cultivator (*kassaka*) is more real than between the *kṣatriya* and the *śūdra*.[61] Another dichotomy of a different kind was that between the householder and the monk. In the parallel society of the *saṅgha*, social distinctions are sought to be negated and the doctrine and its laws are universally applicable to all. In the concept of the *cakkavattin* the king dispenses justice and acts righteously irrespective of caste considerations. The law of *Dhamma* was a universally applicable ethic and this places it above any given reality.

This difference is also apparent in the two institutions symbolic of the ideological forms of the doctrines. The Vedic hermitages were *āśramas*, retreats in the forest inhabited generally by *brāhmaṇas* and their wives and disciples, removed from cities and settlements and self-sufficient in their needs. Those living there had fulfilled their social obligations and moved towards renunciation in the twilight of their lives. This was a contrast to the Buddhist *saṅgha*, open even to the young. The *saṅgha* was the assembly or coming together of a number of people drawn from various backgrounds in the common pursuit of a path to *nirvāṇa*. These were located close to settlements and cities from where they drew their sustenance. Both the *āśrama* and the monastery often performed the function of frontier settlements in later periods when the monasteries also become self-sufficient and more distanced from settlements. Travelling monks and renouncers formed a network of communication in which an exchange of ideas was natural. In this earlier period the dependence of the monastery on the settlement was the reversal of the self-sufficient *āśrama*. Since the Buddhist monastic tradition did not have an ecclesiastical parallel or a secular clergy, its relations with the lay community had to be close. The early bifurcation of shaman and priest continues into these times. Shamanistic traces can be seen in the questioning of the sacrificial ritual and the alternate path to liberation in *yoga* and meditation. The concern with individual salvation and *nirvāṇa* was alien to shamanism and can be traced to Upaniṣadic thought. The transformation of this thought into the doctrine of the sect was to become the foundation in turn for other ideologies and belief systems.

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3

Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millennium BC *in Northern India**

The first millennium BC witnessed a seemingly spontaneous burst of new ideologies in areas that subsequently became nuclear regions for major civilizations. The impression is one of a chain of apparently similar developments linking the then known world. The geographical reach of these civilizations was relatively confined, and allowed the formation of a network of connections resulting from conquest, trade, and religious missions. The almost simultaneous and sustained period of speculative thought throughout this area resulted either from the juxtaposition of a number of seminal regions and their interconnections or from internal developments within each society that broke the seeming quiescence of the earlier bronze age cultures.

The sixth to third centuries BC in northern India saw the emergence of patterns of thought that were embryonic to the evolution of what was called in later centuries the Indian ethos. This paper is an attempt to observe the historical anatomy of this period and to point up the intellectual processes that gave a legitimacy to these patterns. The focus is narrow and concentrates on Buddhism, seen not merely as the teaching of a single individual but rather as a wider response to a particular doctrine and as a reaction to the changing milieu with which it was associated.

The middle of the first millennium introduces a new ideological perspective, which, although touched upon marginally in Vedic literature, is more fully developed in the teachings of what came to be called 'the heterodox sects'. To the extent that Buddhism subsumes this new perspective, it is convenient to juxtapose the polarity of Vedic thought with that of Buddhism. The primary concern of the new attitude is with the perception of change, the recognition that the context during this period was different from any that had existed before. The outcome of this recognition was the growth of ideologies that were at the same time innovative and germinal to the social and religious philosophy and ethical thought of subsequent periods. This carried within it the elements both of pessimism at the passing of the old order and of optimism in having discovered a way to deal with the changed situation. The 'way' as perceived by the Buddha was arrived at through an innovation in ideology—the notion of causation. Causation in turn highlighted other aspects of innovative thinking, some entirely new, others resulting from the extension of existing ideas.

To understand the perception of change at this time and the need for a new ideology the authors of these ideas have to be seen in a historical context. The priorities in their questions and the kinds of avenues which they explored in a search for answers were not unconnected with the historical milieu in which they lived. They appeared in response to the essentially urban civilization of the Ganga plain. This is often termed the 'second urbanization' of early India, the first having been that of the third millennium in the Indus plain. The antecedents to this second urbanization point to a shift in geographical location from the nuclear area of the third millennium. The Indus civilization had declined by the middle of the second millennium BC, and the new culture of the Ganga civilization grew and matured on the other side of the watershed during the first millennium BC, seemingly unconnected with the earlier copper-age civilization. Technologically the new urbanization was based on the use of iron, the domestication of the horse, the extension of plough agriculture, and a sophisticated agricultural and commercial economy. Until recently it was believed that the new civilization grew under the aegis of nomadic pastoralists speaking an Indo-European language, Sanskrit, who had conquered the existing inhabitants, possibly destroyed the bronze-age cities, and had given rise to the new civilization in the process of settling down in the Ganga plain—thus moving, as it were, from the age of the heroes to that of princes and traders. But fresh evidence has suggested that this discontinuity is more imagined than real: many aspects of the later culture bear the impress of the earlier civilization in spite of the considerable difference in the physical location.[1]

Technological changes were not the only indication of a new historical context, for these changes coincided with various other developments. Clan identity gradually gave way to territorial identity. The territorial units, or *janapadas*, that emerged were named after the *kṣatriyas* and others constituting the *janas* (tribes) settled thereon, such as Gandhāra, Kuru, Pañcāla, Matsya, Cedi, Kāśī, Kosala, Magadha, etc. Lineage, speech, and customary law were the three criteria of identity and status in the earlier society, with lineage being central to political control and claims to land. The *kṣatriya* clans were landowning, and some were later assigned to either the Candravaṃśa (Lunar) or the Sūryavaṃśa (Solar) lineages. The location of the two was distinct, with the Candravaṃśa lineages centered in the Doāb, and extending southward and westward, and the Sūryavaṃśa centered in the middle Ganga plain. The separate identity of the Doāb and South Bihar is evident at every point. Cultivated land was initially owned in common by members of *kṣatriya* lineages—the *khattiyas* of Buddhist literature—although much of the actual tilling appears to have been done by the *dāsas* (slaves) and *bhṛtakas* (hired labourers and servants).[2] Lineage rights thus included land ownership, and lineage connections were carefully recorded. This accounts for the predominantly *kṣatriya* oligarchic political organization in many *janapadas*.

The stress on kinship ties was further emphasized by the use of the word *jāti* ('assigned by birth'). It occurs first in a late text and is used in the sense of an extended family.[3] In time, the references to *jana* decreased and those to *jāti* increased, until in Buddhist literature *jāti* is used in the sense of caste, implying an endogamous kinship group, ranked in a list of specialized occupations and service relationships reflecting an increase in social stratification. The bi-polarity of purity and pollution remained an important characteristic of the classification by *varṇa*, but this classification was of a more theoretical kind involving initially four (*brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, and śūdra*) and subsequently five (with the addition of the *pañcama* or 'untouchable') groups in society, and eventually became more closely related to ritual status than to social status. *Jāti* slowly became the gauge of a more precise assessment of the socio-economic status of a group, but the criteria of status continued to include ritual status (*varṇa*).

During the time of the Buddha (sixth to fifth centuries BC) a major change in the agrarian structure was the emergence of large estates owned by individual *kṣatriya* clans; the criterion of wealth came to be associated more with land and money and less with cattle, which had been the measure of riches in the earlier society. The transfer of land took place largely within the same social group that had earlier maintained joint ownership. As an adjunct to this development of a landed class, there is a noticeable increase in the categories of wage labourer, hired labourer, and slave. The slave had the *varṇa* status of a *śūdra*, which was particularly necessary for those who worked as domestic slaves, the more common category met with in the Indian sources. A text of the late first millennium BC mentions the price of a slave as being a hundred pieces of money; by comparison, a pair of oxen was twenty-four pieces.[4] Slaves were probably expensive even in earlier centuries and could not therefore be used too extensively in production.

Agriculture provided the economic base for the growth of towns in the Ganga plain. Many of the cities, apart from being important commercial centres, were also the capitals of the *janapadas* such as Kauśāmbi, Kāśī, Ayodhyā, and Rajagṛha. These were not the cities of bronze-age civilization, but were the nuclei of the affluent and the natural habitat of the *seṭṭhi-gahapatis*, the immensely wealthy traders and financiers. The flexibility of an urban economy increasingly based on markets was facilitated by three innovations—the use of a script, the consequent issuing of promissory notes, letters of credit, and pledges, and the introduction of money in the form of silver and copper punch-marked coins issued initially, it has been suggested, by traders' guilds. These, in turn, resulted in the new profession of trading in money, and the appearance of the banker deriving his wealth from usury. Unlike the Buddhist texts, the *brāhmaṇa* sources disapprove of usury, although the censure is restricted to *brāhmaṇas'* fraternizing with those who live off usury.[5] Apart from the archaeological evidence, another indication, albeit indirect, of the growth of cities is the rapid rise of Jainism when, with the prohibition on agricultural professions and restriction on ownership of land, trade became the predominant occupation of the Jainas. The discovery of new routes and the revival of old routes were further incentives to trade.[6]

The city produced its own social stratification, where the *śreṣṭhin* ('merchant or banker') was to become powerful and where the institutional base was to be that of the *śreṇī* ('guild'). This explains why various religious sects competed for the patronage of the *śresthins*.[7] Yet in Brahmanical literature the trader is not included among the superior social groups. The varṇa-ranking of the *vaiśya* ('trader') in the third position may have been irksome to those who had such access to wealth. Furthermore, power in

Brahmanical terms was connected with ownership of land; although not ultimately associated with the *śreṣṭhin*, land was by no means his primary source of wealth. Up to a point there was a distinction between the urban and rural élite—the *seṭṭhi/śreṣṭhin* and the *khattiya/kṣatriya* and *gahapatis*—because they derived their income from different sources. But some of the latter who owned estates were also town-dwellers, and thus formed another group alongside the traders and merchants.

The guild was emerging as an essential institution of urban life, acting as a centre of both professional and kin cohesion. The recognition of *śreṇī-dharma* (the customary law of the guilds) as legitimate law by the end of the millennium is another indication of the powerful status of the *śreṇī*.[8] Ultimately it evolved into an agency of caste organization where some of the larger and better established guilds took on *jāti* status; no less important was the role of the guilds in later centuries as patrons of the heterodox sects.

The lower orders of the guild were the *karmakāras* ('artisans') and the *antevāsikas* ('apprentices'), who were nevertheless still superior to the *dāsabhṛtaka* ('slaves and hired labourers'). These, together with the cultivators, were all included in the rank of *śūdras*. In Brahmanical texts, their low rank was maintained by the legal fiction that they were of mixed caste origin. The gradation among *śūdras* ran from the *sacchūdra* ('clean *śūdra*') to the edge of untouchability. The untouchables constituted the fifth major group. Their untouchability derived from their being considered polluting either because of their occupation as scavengers, such as Caṇḍālas and Doms and those who maintained the cremation grounds, or because they belonged to primitive tribes. Their speech was alien and their manner of life was strange. Later the Buddhists despised the Caṇḍālas. The inequities of city life further aggravated the degradation of these groups, already declared impure on account of ritual pollution.

The rise of political authority as symbolized in systems of government and the concept of the state were explained in a variety of ways. Vedic literature had connected the emergence of kingship with the emergence of government, and stressed that the qualities of leadership in battle and elements of divinity were essential to kingship.[9] By the middle of the first millennium, tribal egalitarianism had surrendered to the evolution of a system of government that, whether oligarchic or monarchical, was explained as concerning itself with the problems of social disharmony, the need for authority, and the justification for revenue collection. The Buddhist theory emphasized the perfection of society in the pre-government age, thus implying that government had become an unfortunate necessity,[10] through the diffusion of social disharmony resulting from family discord and private property. Seeking a solution, people had gathered together and elected a leader—the *mahāsammata*, 'the Great Elect'—in whom they invested the authority to maintain law and order; in payment for this service the *mahāsammata* was paid a share of the revenue. Significantly the Buddhist theory emphasizes contract and seems not to have had any notion of royal divinity. The *Mahābhārata* expresses a similar idea, but with a greater emphasis on the notion that societies without governments result in anarchy, the anarchic society is described as a state of *mātsyānyāya*' the law of the fish', where, in a condition of drought the big fish devour the smaller ones.[11] In this theory, the king also contracts to maintain law and order, but an element of divinity is introduced in his actual appointment as king.

These theories reflect an increasing sense of alienation where it becomes necessary to enforce harmony, since the supposed pristine natural harmony of society has disappeared. They also reflect the acceptance of the idea of authority based on power and not necessarily on kinship alone. The *janapadas* were coalescing into territorial states. By the fifth century BC competition for power had already developed among the stronger of the major *janapadas*, such as Kāśī, Kosala and Magadha, where even close kinship ties were ignored to further political gains. Magadha was to emerge as the most powerful, ultimately becoming the nucleus of the Mauryan empire, which was built on the conquests of Candragupta Maurya in the fourth century BC and comprised, during the reign of his grandson Aśoka, almost the entire Indian subcontinent and eastern Afghanistan. With the growth of political authoritarianism and a complicated state machinery, it is not surprising that the justification for the emergence of government came to be based on the necessity for taxation and the need to maintain law and order.[12]

Two coexisting systems of economic redistribution came into being and sometimes into conflict as well. One, at the level of the state, derived its income from taxes, tributes and fines and redistributed it through awards, salaries, grants, and expenditures on public works and ceremonies. But the redistribution was not equitable, and the prestige economy, particularly in the monarchical states, consumed a large part of the income. The second system, on a lesser scale, was confined to the merchants and bankers of the cities; among them the ethic of redistribution was such that

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substantial sums were retained as capital for further investment.[13] They were doubtless irritated by the economy of demands by the state. That the second system could function in the cities points to their more diffused political authority; this is also suggested by the absence of citadels in these cities. To some extent money liberated the financier from overarching political control.

Caste structure at this time grew out of a variety of interrelationships between groups. The purity–pollution dichotomy, which above all demarcated the *brāhmaṇa* from the untouchable and which was absent in the earlier period, is by now well established. The *ārya–dāsa* dichotomy deriving from, linguistic, and cultural differences was now replaced by the *ārya–śūdra* dichotomy, where the main criteria are the use of Sanskrit and the observance of the *varṇa* rules. Non-*āryas* are *mleccha* ('the barbarians' or 'the impure') and are generally ranked as *śūdras* except in later centuries, when foreign conquerors such as the Indo-Greeks had to be given the dubious status of '*vrātya* or degenerate *kṣatriyas*'. The formation of new castes, theoretically resulting from the intermixing of the original four, was probably a more open system than has hitherto been recognised. The evidence from subsequent centuries suggests that new *jātis* arose as a result of incorporating tribes and guilds and, still later, religious sects into caste society.

The complexity of the new society is clearly reflected in the need for codifying the laws of the various social groups, which is what is aimed at in the Brahmanical *dharmasūtras*. The purpose of the laws is to differentiate between the various social groups generally identified as those of *jana*, *jāti*, and *varṇa*. These, however, are made part of a cohesive view of society. There is an implicit belief that the demarcation of differences would lead to a resolution of tensions, an attitude that could only have been feasible in the absence of a situation of conflict. Also implicit in the *dharmasūtras* is the *brāhmaṇas'* claim to being the arbiters of the law. There was no overt challenge to this claim since the codification did not aim at a uniformity of laws, but, on the contrary, to the recognition of their caste diversity. The Buddhist social code, on the other hand, stressed broad ethical principles of general application to a variety of social groups into the new patterns. The integration was easier at the theoretical level. At the practical level there was a tendency to separate ritual status (*varṇa*) from actual status (*jāti*). Social roles were not entirely dependent on the one or the other. The older traditions and norms were thus placated, and the new

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entrants into the social hierarchy were not entirely disappointed. However, the demarcation was in fact by no means facile or simplistic. Many of the later subtleties and intricacies of caste relationships emanate from this early attempt at demarcation.

It was apparent that a condition of permanence was neither feasible nor possible in the world of reality where all was flux. Even the above brief survey of the historical scene shows that the condition of constant change could not be ignored.[14] It affected the assumptions of the philosophers of the time and is still reflected in the prevailing intellectual systems. The consciousness of change is perhaps seen most clearly in the fundamental problem of human salvation or liberation in which three interrelated aspects were emphasized—the ethic of the individual in terms of his own moral consciousness and his search for release from the bonds of human existence, the verification of ultimate knowledge so essential to the working out of a means of liberation, and finally the discovery of a path to liberation. The prime motivation was to find an answer that would subsume changing material conditions and yet remain viable. The Buddhist attempt to analyse these problems makes a point of contrasting the attempts of other groups of thinkers similarly involved.

That these concerns were widespread is apparent from the rise of a variety of what have been called 'heterodox sects', among which Buddhism was included. These sects were not merely a reaction to Vedic religion, as is often suggested, because within the Vedic-*brāhmaṇa* framework there had also been a diversification of views as evidenced by the *Upaniṣads* and the *Āraṇyakas*. These were the discourses of a mixed group of some renouncers, some chiefs of clans and a few who lived in forest retreats. They stood apart, disenchanted with existing explanations, seeking ultimate truths. Their discourses show a liberation of the speculative consciousness from the burdens of magical sacrifice and ritual. However, the universalistic basis of their thinking had some limitations. They recognised the need for individual salvation. In isolation and through *saṃnyāsa* ('asceticism'), the individual could find his *mokṣa* ('liberation from rebirth') which would release his *ātman* (individual 'soul') and enable it to unite with the *brahman* ('all-soul'). Asceticism was motivated both by a desire to escape from the insecurity of a changing society and by the conviction that meditation was an effective means of acquiring the knowledge that furthers self-realization as well as the potential (*tapas*) to become superior even to the gods. Gradually asceticism came to be regarded as a more powerful force than sacrifice, thus admitting the ineffectiveness of a community attempt to reach moments of magic and power. Perhaps more important, asceticism resulted in total freedom, a break with family ties and social obligations, provided sexual needs could be sublimated. Hence the correlation between asceticism and asexuality. This freedom insured the renouncer a moral status far higher than that of even a sacrificing *brāhmaṇa*.

Some sects, such as the Ājīvikas, based their thought on determinism and saw renunciation as the only and ultimate path to *mokṣa*. The Buddhists and the Jainas had both philosophical and social concerns. Access to knowledge did not lie through the authoritative voice of the *Vedas*, for what is not personally verifiable is unacceptable. Nor is scepticism a path to knowledge; the sceptics are described by the Buddhists as 'eel-wrigglers'. Even asceticism was not possible as a path to salvation for everyone. Both the Buddha and Mahāvīra, though seeking enlightenment through isolated meditation, nevertheless returned to the world of the cities and villages to preach the path of salvation to the householder who could not become a monk owing to his social obligations. In the case of the Buddha, the emphasis on 'the middle way', the path devoid of excesses, emphasizing moderation and a moral life, was indicative of his concern that the path suggested by him be compatible with the real problems of social existence. Not surprisingly, the early supporters of Buddhism were not only the ascetics but also, and in larger numbers, the *seṭṭhis* and members of the *kṣatriya* clans. At the other extreme were a number of *lokāyata* sects, particularly the Cārvākas, who were based primarily in the towns and who taught a thoroughgoing materialism, such as the teachings of Ajīta Keśakambalin, which was seen by some others as an idealization of hedonism.

The thread of social protest winding through these heterodox teachings was indicative of a perception of change: of existing change, the recognition that further changes were imminent, and toward change itself. For the Buddhists, change was symbolized in two strands, which occasionally intertwined, the cosmic and the historical. The universe is transient and in a state of continuous flux. Buddhist cosmic time was cyclical, starting with a pristine Utopian society, which had gradually decayed and was slowly reaching its nadir of sorrow and suffering—the direction in which contemporary society was moving. Eventually the time cycle would rise upwards again and begin a Utopian phase. Brahmanical sources, also positing cyclical time, attempted a mathematical measurement of it, albeit of an infinite magnitude, as did the Buddhists, who indicated infinite eons by spatial descriptions.[15] Time was seen as an unending continuity of which historical time was but a fraction. Within this continuity the individual consciousness also moved unceasingly from one lifetime to the next birth until liberated from the chain of rebirth. It is compared to the flame of a lamp used to light another lamp and so on, *ad infinitum*. In each case the flame of the lamp is both the old and the new flame, and so it is with the perception of change in the continuity of time.

Change, therefore, cannot be seen as a sudden break. But within historical time there is a far sharper awareness of the past and the future. Other 'enlightened ones' have trod the same path in the past as the Buddha. Was this allegorical, or was it a reference to earlier teachers with a similar doctrine? There is also the reference to the Buddha Maitreya, who will reawaken the world to the *Dharma* ('the law') many centuries after the present Buddha.[16] This was to develop in the first centuries after Christ into almost a millennarian movement within Buddhism, no doubt further stimulated by contact with the messianic message of Christianity and Manichaeism. The decline from Utopian beginnings is not accidental. There is a concern with moral decay, which, although partially inherent (the very state of nature having evolved from luminosity to dross), is nevertheless caused by changes in the material content of life. It can be circumvented to some extent by the individual's choice in the manner of adapting to changing social situations.

Central to the awareness of change is the law of causality, and it is around this that much of Buddhist doctrine revolves, claiming to derive from rational arguments and examples. At the individual level, the interconnection between desire, suffering, and rebirth is explained by causality. The elimination of *dukkha* ('suffering') lies in the elimination of *tanha* ('desire'), and this can be achieved by observing the precepts of the *Dhamma/Dharma* ('the Law as taught by the Buddha') and the eight-fold path. Social change is also explained by causality and becomes a part of the underpinning, as it were, of the universal applicability of the *Dharma*, for, once the causal connection is known, change comes under human control.

This led to a new perspective on the significance of the individual. The heterodox teaching, and Buddhism in particular, turned the earlier perspective inside out, and the focus shifted to the individual rather than the social group to which he belonged. Up to a point this encouraged a nihilistic trend, as in the case of the Ājīvikas. But nihilism was not characteristic of all sects. On this question the central core of the Buddhist *Dharma* is very clear. Where renunciation or opting out is not feasible, the individual, whatever his social status, had the choice of becoming a lay disciple and observing the rules of 'the middle way'. Furthermore, the moral responsibility of the individual was seen in the choice of action made by him through his chain of rebirth. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* described rebirth as consisting of *saṃsāra*, the transmigration of souls, to which was added the notion of *karma* ('action'), the outcome of the activities of one life affecting the next. The Buddhists modified the notion of *saṃsāra* to exclude the soul and to refer to consciousness as the element that continues, and they appropriated the doctrine of *karma* in its entirety. Thus not only was the individual responsible for the nature and condition of his present and future lives, but the doctrine of *karma* also became a useful means of explaining the origin of social inequality and the creation of caste society.[17] Not only was a man's social condition a reference point in social justice, but disease, physical pain, and even death were seen as aspects of social justice, although the moral responsibility for this condition rested with the individual. Thus the sting of social protest was numbed by insisting that there was no tangible agency responsible for social injustice, or even an abstract deity against whom man could complain, but that responsibility belonged with man himself. This in turn tended to curb nonconformity in behaviour for fear of the consequences in the next life.

It is not altogether fortuitous that Buddhism was popular among the entrepreneurs and the life-affirming groups in Indian society—the merchants and the artisans. Nor should it be forgotten that at the political level Buddhism registered its initial success in the period of the first empire, that of the Mauryas. The life-asserting aspect of *karma* is that, if the rules are observed, the next birth can at least bring a better and more prosperous life, if not freedom from the chain of rebirth. There can be, therefore, considerable motivation for observing the rules. That the onus was on the individual is further emphasized by the necessity of being born a human, rather than any other creature, before release can be attained. Moral responsibility was not developed into a philosophy of radical change, which would have meant challenging the existing system. The Buddha made a distinction between caste as the frame of the socio-economic structure, which he accepted, and the notion of the relative purity inherent in the upper castes, which he rejected.[18] The emphasis was on an individual's choice of an ethic, but the end result of this had its social implications.

Fundamental to Buddhist teaching was the notion of the interplay of acts of merit (*puṇya*) and demerit (*papa*, literally 'evil, wickedness'), and *puṇya* becomes central to ethical thought from this time onwards. The constituents of merit for the layman are activities motivated by the need to further social good, such as harmonious social relationships and charity, but, above all, sexual control and non-violence. Harmony in social relationships referred not only to those between parents and children, but also between master and slave, and employer and employee in general. This had a clear correlation with the large estates of the *khattiyas* and the new urban culture. Although the Buddha associates the growth of evil in the world with (among other factors) the institutions of the family and private property, both of which, he argues, encouraged sentiments of possessiveness and consequently aggression, he nevertheless projects an undisturbed continuity for both institutions. In spite of its evils, the family did weaken the sense of alienation, and hence there is a stress on respecting kinship ties. Charity was seen not only as a means of alleviating the suffering of the materially poor, but also as the giving of gifts (*dāna*) especially to the *saṅgha* (the order of monks). This had the additional advantage of strengthening the monastic organization and its relations with the lay community.

Both sexual puritanism and non-violence became controversial issues in the debate among the various sects. The Buddha was not loathe to accept the devotion of the more renowned and accomplished courtesans of the towns, such as Ambapālī, but it took considerable persuasion for him to agree to admit women into the *saṅgha*. Family ties were a major obstacle to renunciation, and women were symbolic of these ties. Yet during this time it was only in the Jaina and Buddhist orders that nuns were permitted, and the women were drawn largely from urban society and the royal households.

Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), the central focus of Buddhist and Jaina ethics, was less important in other religious sects. Veiled, ambiguous references can be culled from the *Upaniṣads*, but the exposition of the idea as an ethical value was that of Mahāvīra and the Buddha. The Jaina understanding of *ahiṃsā* appears to be an extreme position involving all created beings and the attempt to preserve them from destruction, whether deliberate or accidental.[19] The Buddhists tend to stress the ethical question of man's actions in furthering or preventing violence.

Ahiṃsā can be viewed in association with many facets of contemporary life. It has been seen as an objection to the sacrifice of animals during the *yajña*, the sacrificial ceremony essential to the Vedic Brahmanical religion. There is repeated mention of the futility of killing animals as a religious ritual.[20] Possibly this coincided with the transformation of pastoral groups into agriculturalists, which resulted in a depletion of animal wealth.[21] The debate on the inviolability of the cow is referred to *en passant* in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, but it is again largely due to Buddhist and Jaina disputation that the prohibition is extended from cattle to violence *per se.*[22] *Ahiṃsā* can also be explained as a reaction among the new urban groups to the prestige economy of non-urban societies, who were wilfully destroying wealth to no purpose. Sacrifice, it was argued, is essentially an offering; consequently it lies not in the destruction of life but in the embodiment of moral values that become the foundation for ethical behaviour—in honouring parents, in honouring all the members of the household from the highest to the lowest, in having patience, meekness, and self-control. The values listed are both conservative and conciliatory. Yet the element of radicalism in this view is the inclusion of slaves and workmen as deserving of honour. At another level *ahiṃsā* would have suited those who were discouraging inter-tribal warfare and encouraging the expansion of settled agriculture and trade—activities from which both the *khattiyas* and *seṭṭhis* stood to gain.

Ahiṃsā also included a discouragement of the use of coercion and violence to justify political authoritarianism—very pertinent to the transformation of the *janapadas* into kingdoms laying political claim to large territories. The suspicion of political authoritarianism may have to do with the fact that the heterodox sects often had their genesis in the relatively more egalitarian tradition of the chiefdoms, such as that of the Śākyas and Vṛjjis. Those most directly affected by war would be the cultivators, whose fields were the prey of marauding armies, and the traders, who would be unable to transport their goods, or, even worse, whose centres of production would be destroyed in the devastation of a town—so often the symbolic final act of a successful campaign. Possibly *ahiṃsā* could also undermine the ritualized wars—the campaigns that were fought subsequent to the *aśvamedha* sacrifice, when a king claiming sovereignty over a region would release a sacrificial horse and would then be duty bound to conquer all the lands over which the horse wandered. Implicit in *ahiṃsā* at the political level is an objection to even the legitimate use of coercion (*daṇḍa*) by the political authority of the state. The king in his role as protector should avoid coercion, modelling himself after the ideal universal monarch, the *cakravartin*, who is *adaṇḍa*, 'not having to resort to coercion'.[23]

Ahiṃsā might have had an ameliorative influence in situations of tension, which were by no means rare. Ultimately there was also the ethical and philosophical level. Conscious non-violence (not to be confused with cowardice) was expressive of the highest ethical stand. The credibility of non-violence can only stem from a belief in man's innate virtue. It has been argued that the Buddha's *ahiṃsā* represents the negative philosophy of pacifism. To the extent that the Buddha was not preaching rebellion, but rather a conciliatory ethic, as a solution to social ills, the negative aspect of pacifism can be justified. But if *ahiṃsā* arose from an awareness of varying levels of comprehension and reaction, then pacifism alone cannot be the complete explanation. As a method of social protest, the objection even to ritual sacrifice involving the destruction of life takes on an active and affirmative role, as is evident from the continuing debate on this subject up to recent times. It is perhaps also worth remembering that the Brahmanical insistence on vegetarianism dates to the post-Buddhist period.

The significance of renunciation has its own role in the Buddhist moral position and relates to the moral and political authority of the renouncer. There has been a tendency to see renunciation as a purely life-denying process. This it may be if the renouncer moves away from society and lives in isolation, though, even here, the negative aspect to the isolation is rarely foremost. But if the renouncer, after a period of isolation, resumes a function in society, in spite of his having renounced his ties, his influence can become both powerful and positive. Moral and political authority are separated and the former becomes the censor of the latter. This separation can be crucial to the establishing of an independent intellectual tradition, as was the case in the lifetime of the Buddha, provided that the independent relationship between the two is not eroded by the requirements of patronage. If the renouncer is also in sympathy with the aspirations of a community and if he comes from a social background not generally associated with life-denial and renunciation, but rather with political authority and social status (such as the *khattiyas* of the time), his moral authority is almost unlimited. In such situations the renouncer forsakes one life-style to take on another.

Recruitment to the heterodox sects was not limited to any particular group. Those who had an organized body of adherents, enlisted monks, and built monasteries, encouraged people of all castes to join the organization and, in theory at least, did not bar any caste. In the Buddhist *saṅgha* the adoption of a new name by the monk was symbolic not merely of a new birth in the *saṅgha* but also of a removal from his caste and status.[24] The proximity of all castes within the monasteries ran counter to the Brahmanical ideas of the segregation of castes in daily living. Commensality among such monks from the lay community broke the food taboos so essential to the *varṇa* system. Outside the monastery and among lay followers the problem of integrating social groups remained.

Each *jāti* had its own religious observances. Religious differentiations were preserved through the mechanism of caste, as were the observance of rituals pertaining to local cults, some of which were assimilated into Buddhist practice.[25] The Buddhist shift of emphasis from deities to the more abstract notion of *dharma* ('the law') was an attempt in part to undermine these religious differentiations. It may be argued that the absence of a deity in Buddhism inherent in the doctrine strengthened the idea of a universal religion. In some ways, however, *dharma* almost took on the characteristics of an omniscient presence symbolized in the turning of the wheel of the law. *Dharma* was the eternal Law—ultimate, timeless, temporal, transcendent, immanent. In spite of changing human society the Law remained changeless. It integrated within itself the ethic of the individual, the verification of ultimate knowledge, and the path to salvation. Change was perceived, recognized, and understood. But it was not the changed situation that was to be subjected to radical social alteration as much as the law that was to be applicable in all situations. The law was above the particular and was universally viable. Enlightenment lay in the discovery of this law and identification with it. But the law was not to be kept to oneself in isolation. The enlightened ones must return to the cities and the villages and preach the law. There is the repeated parable of the raft, where he who has discovered the law (the raft) must leave the raft for others to cross the waters on it.[26]

The arbiters of the *dharma* were the Elders of the monastery. The Buddhist monastery was both a retreat for meditation and an institution for action. The early monasteries had to be located close to large concentrations of population, because of the requirement that the monks feed off alms, since they were forbidden to do any manual labour including cultivating their own food. Begging for alms and preaching the doctrine brought them into contact with the lay community. The *saṅgha* was thus a collection of renouncers but not of ascetics. The monks took on a new way of life based on communal sharing and dedication to poverty, evidenced by the prohibition against personal possessions and by the name they adopted, *bhikṣu* (mendicant). Central to the organization of the *saṅgha* was the emphasis on the equal status of every monk, influenced perhaps by the more egalitarian political organization of the oligarchic *janapadas*, familiar to the Buddha. But this insistence on equality did not apply to the world outside. It was almost as if the creation of a radical, egalitarian society within the monastery exhausted the drive toward such a society in the world outside, or at least weakened the urgency of radical change—assuming, however, that this had been intended. Celibacy and the discouraging of manual labour for the monks point up the bi-polarity between the monk and the householder where the latter qualifies himself in part by his ties to family and property.[27] The monk and the householder lived in worlds apart.

The *saṅgha* gradually acquired a strong sense of mission. This is evident from the frequency of the councils determining the true doctrine and the splintering off of sects within the *saṅgha* after the death of the Buddha, each claiming to represent the true doctrine. Even more significant was the system of maintaining records and historical accounts not only of the major events in the history of Buddhism, but also of the more important sects within the *saṅgha* that encouraged the polemics of Buddhist sectarian thought. The community of renouncers was not altogether unaware either of its political role or of its role in the new ethic that they were promulgating.

The sense of mission was encouraged by the literate monks. The monasteries developed into centres of learning. This was again a point of opposition to the Vedic Brahmanical approach for which literacy was the preserve of the socially-determined few and which in any case laid greater stress on the oral tradition. As a part of the appeal to the wider audience, the Buddha preached not in Sanskrit but in *ardha-māgadhi*—a *prākṛit* of the middle Ganga plain. At the same time as Brahmanical culture was seeking an *ārya* identity and exclusivity, the Buddha was breaking away from it.

The extension of literacy was symbolic of much that the new ideologies stood for, the insufficiency of faith and ritual and the incorporation of reason and moral action in a manner that would have wide applicability to large numbers of people of diverse social origins. The new teachers arose as individuals and not through an institutional base. But the continuance of the new ideologies required the building of their own institutional base. The perception of change and the need to come to terms with it were not seen as synonymous with a radical ideology in favour of a total change. The Buddhists, for example, were more analytical than earlier thinkers in their views on man and society, but they did not feel it necessary to suggest a complete reorganization of the social structure. To that degree, Buddhism in its historical role touched the chords of social protest but went no further. This was perhaps because the groups for which it was projecting a new ideology ceased to be the protesters at a certain historical point and became the heirs. The element of social protest in Buddhism was therefore limited to providing the intellectual encouragement and justification for the formation of a new elite. It can be argued that in the historical context of those times even this was a radical position and it was not necessary to extend causation to its logical limits. The *lokāyatas* who insisted on natural causation and opposed the doctrine of *karma* were either subsumed into the new system or were left on the fringes as anarchists.

The historical mission of Buddhism took it far afield. The monasteries, irrespective of sectarian differences, acted as networks of acculturation and contact within the Indian subcontinent reaching out into the remotest corners, monks travelling either in isolation or accompanying the traders. In the first millennium AD the significance of the mission of Buddhism was that it acted as a catalyst in many parts of Asia. Its major orientation was in Central Asia, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. The period when Buddhism took root and prospered in these new areas coincided with its fading in the country of its origin. Can this be regarded as a historical demonstration of the Buddhist notion of change and continuity—the analogy with the flame of one lamp lighting the flame of another before being extinguished?

Notes and References

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1. Archaeological evidence of the post-Harappan period, particularly in Gujarat, Malwa, the Banas valley, and parts of the watershed and upper Doāb, points to

some continuities of cultural traits from the Harappa culture. Small settlements of primitive agriculturalists in the Doab or the western Ganga plain (the Ochre-Colour Pottery culture) were superseded toward the end of the second millennium BC by larger settlements of more advanced agriculturalists gradually taking to iron technology by the earlier part of the first millennium BC (the Painted Gray-Ware Culture). Further east, in the middle Ganga plain and south Bihar, the impetus for using an iron technology is associated with apparently different groups of people (the Black- and Red-Ware cultures), who appear to have had some links with western India via the northern part of the central Indian plateau. The Doāb was the geographical focus of the later Vedic literature and was identified (in the main) in Brahmanical literature with the *āryāvarta* or the land of the *āryas* (the respectable people), those who spoke Sanskrit and observed the caste laws. South Bihar, which included the territory of Magadha, was to a greater extent the geographical focus of 'the heterodox sects'. In the Buddhist and Jaina texts, south Bihar was the core of the *āryāvarta*, since these texts tended to give a more easterly location to the 'pure land'. An area of high precipitation, the Ganga plain was at that time covered with forests. It has been argued that settlement on any appreciable scale would have been virtually impossible before the introduction of iron technology, the monsoon forest being relatively impervious to the tools of copper technology. That the introduction of iron could have coincided with an increase in population is also possible judging by impressionistic archaeological data. The iron-age precondition to urbanization is evident from the number of settlements of iron-using cultures that developed into towns. Increase in population not only assisted in the clearing of more land for agriculture in the Ganga plain, but could also have acted as a lever toward encouraging a change to iron technology and more particularly to plough-using agriculture. However a technology by itself cannot be the causal factor in major historical change and has to be accompanied by other changes in the society and economy. Urbanisation is therefore a more complex process than can be explained by a single technological change.

2. Patañjali, *Mahābhāṣya* on Pāṇini, IV, I.168.
3. *Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, XV.4.14; XV.2.11.
4. *Nanda Jātaka*, 1.98; *Gāmani Caṇḍa Jātaka*, II.207.
5. *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra*, I.6.18.22; *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra*, 1.5.93–4.
6. Maritime trade with west Asia was revived in the late first millennium BC. Close contacts were established between Iran and north-western India. Within the subcontinent, overland and maritime routes to the south (Dakṣiṇāpatha) were being explored.
7. Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha*, Bombay, 1996 (2nd ed.).
8. *Manu Dharmaśāstra*, VIII.41.

9. *Ṛg Veda*, VIII.35.17; 86.10–11.
10. *Digha Nikāya*, III.93.
11. *Mahābhārata*, Śānti Parvan, 67.3ff.
12. The words used for the two basic taxes were *bali*, originally meaning a tribute or offering and eventually coming to mean a tax on land as resource, and *bhāga*, meaning 'a share' and applied to the produce of the land, reflecting the more stable distribution of settled times. An early term for the king was *bhāgadugha*, literally, 'he who milks the share'.
13. As suggested by the Buddha in *Dīgha Nikāya*, III, p. 188 (P.T.S. ed.).
14. For a correlation of material conditions with the rise of Buddhism, R.S. Sharma, 'Material Milieu of the Birth of Buddhism', paper presented to the Twenty-Ninth International Congress of Orientalists, Paris, 1973.
15. *Samyutta Nikāya*, 15.ii.178–93.
16. *Dīgha Nikāya*, III, 76.
17. *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.289; *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, V.288–91. This is also explicit in the preeminent text of Brahmanism, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, IV.13, composed in the period after the Buddha.
18. *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, III.214; *Samyutta Nikāya*, I.167; *Majjhima Nikāya*, II.128–30.
19. *Ācāraṅga Sūtra*, II.1.1–4.
20. *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, IV.42–5.
21. D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London, 1965, p. 105. Cattle provided both labour and fertilizer in agricultural societies, and any depletion was a serious loss. That cattle were singled out for protection is clear from the emphasis in some sections of the Buddhist texts, such as *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.220.
22. The debate is perhaps best symbolized by passages in the early text, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, III.1.2.21, where the eating of meat (the flesh of the cow is the case in point) is defended by Yājñavalkya, who represents an important point of view, and the later prohibition on it, as for example in the text of Manu dating to the first century BC.
23. Cakkavati Sinhanādasutta, *Dīgha Nikāya*, III, p. 58 (S.B.B. ed.).
24. *Vinaya Piṭaka*, II.239; *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, IV.202.
25. Dates for important events such as the *vassa* (the rainy season when the monks had to return to the monastery), the *uposatha* (the days for the hearing of the confession of the monks), etc. were calculated on the basis of the lunar calendar, although the solar calendar was also in use at the time.
26. *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.134–5; *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, II.201.
27. S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 81ff.

4

*The Oral and the Written in Early India**

I would like in this lecture to consider some of the ways of the transmission of knowledge in early Indian society relating to elements of the oral and written traditions. Let me state at the outset that the areas of knowledge are perforce selective and further, that my interest is largely in raising a few questions relevant to our understanding of this transmission in what are now referred to as 'traditional forms'. I might add that we need to investigate this process from the past not out of intellectual curiosity alone, for it has a bearing on how we transmit knowledge today, as well as on the broader question of the degree to which we use familiar forms or else introduce new ones. In speaking of tradition we should perhaps keep in mind that although it appears to be a process of deliberate continuity, in fact it is a continual selection of desired elements, often arising out of contemporary concerns and defined by existing social relations. To the extent that education organises and carries tradition it includes a selection of such desired knowledge.

Discussions on the transmission of knowledge generally concentrate on the products of high culture expressed in forms involving literacy. It would seem though that if looked at analytically, parallel forms were used. Knowledge is now being defined as the ways in which people organise their everyday experience of the social world. Thus the sociology of knowledge would include not only ideologies, philosophies and belief systems, but also everyday concerns. The organisation of experience as abstract understanding is one among such forms and knowledge as the practice of a technique is another. The latter should especially not be disregarded as it is an essential dimension of knowledge. This is particularly so when literacy is not universal and techniques have to be practiced, improved upon and handed down as part of an oral tradition. The point at which such an oral handling of knowledge is converted to a literate form has its own historical importance.

It is sometimes assumed that with the coming of literacy there is a shutting out of the oral tradition and that if both co-exist there is an antagonism built into the relationship. Yet methods of transmission referring to the oral and the literate involve three situations: firstly, the oral pre-literate tradition; secondly, the interface between the oral and the literate where the relevant question is why the oral tradition was continued when literacy was current and was not necessarily antagonistic to the other but complementary;[1] and thirdly the use of literacy. In a society such as ours where the second of these, the oral-literate interface, continues to be current, the relevance of analysing these relationships can hardly be ignored. I would like therefore to look a little more closely at this link and its articulation in the early Indian past.

In an oral culture there are clearly perceptible mnemonic patterns intertwining serious thought with systems of memorising.[2] These may be expressed as formulaic phrases, as has been so effectively demonstrated in the analysis of epics by Parry and Lord,[3] or even as pictorial representation as has been suggested by Frances Yates in her study of the theatre of memory.[4] It has also been argued that oral thought is situational rather than abstract,[5] but this argument should perhaps not be stretched too far.

Within the oral tradition in India there was a demarcation between a carefully preserved oral tradition and a relatively free oral tradition, a difference which was maintained even when the composition took a literate form. The oral tradition therefore cannot be taken as a single uniform system. It is necessary to classify the varieties within it since their presuppositions, functions and form differed. This is clearly illustrated in the two dominant oral traditions of the first millennium BC which were converted to a written form in subsequent centuries, the Vedic texts on the one hand and the epics on the other.

Vedic hymns were composed and handed down orally over many centuries. Even after writing became current in the third century BC these compositions continued to be recorded orally for some time as they are even to this day in some places. The composers of these primarily ritual texts were priests. The meticulous oral preservation was backed by the theory that the sound was of fundamental importance and therefore a mispronunciation could render the purpose of the ritual ineffective. It has therefore been maintained that the preservation was entirely oral and so it may have been. Yet priestly training in literate societies assumes a knowledge of literacy and the *brāhmaṇas* were no exception. The mnemonic devices used for memorising the hymns, such as the *padapāṭha*, could have been entirely oral but could have included a reference to literacy, for example, in the breaking down of the verse into syllabic segments and the memorisation of these in various patterns. The working out of these mnemonic patterns would probably have been easier if there was a written text as the basis. There is an on-going debate on whether the oral transmission of Vedic compositions was based on reference to a written text.[6] The important point however is that, as ritual texts, the attempt was to freeze the composition in memory. Large-scale memorisation is known to literate societies. It is therefore of greater interest to recognise that in spite of literacy there was a premium on oral recording and that the two continued alongside each other. The continuance of the oral in this case was doubtless largely to insist on the correctness of the sound when recited, which is the stated aim. The unstated aim was to limit the availability of the texts, for oral memorisation was closed to those whom the priests wished to exclude. *Śūdras* are therefore prohibited from even accidentally hearing the Vedic hymns.[7] Here the control is less on the fact of the transmission being oral and more on the power of what is being transmitted and the control of those concerned with the transmission. Correct speech was considered the hallmark of the *brāhmaṇa* and power lay in the sound of the recitation.[8] The association of literacy with power belongs to a later time.

In contrast to this was the freer oral recording of the epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. These were originally composed by bards, the *sūtas*, before they were taken over by *brāhmaṇa* authors, and the Bhṛgu *brāhmaṇas* in particular, who probably recorded them in a written form. The bards wandered from place to place reciting their compositions at the large sacrificial rituals conducted by the *rājās* or at their gatherings.[9] The *Mahābhārata* was recited at the snake sacrifice of Janamejaya. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is said to have been recited by Kuśa and Lava again on a public occasion. (Incidentally, the compound phrase *kuśīlava* came to have the technical meaning of bards).[10] Fragments were composed for special patrons and these were then strung together and tidied up into the longer epics. The bards lived in the present and the requirement of the moment led them to adding on or sloughing off, what they thought was relevant or irrelevant either to themselves or their patron. When the bardic authors were dispensed with and the *brāhmaṇas* took over, changes of other kinds were introduced: the hero became an incarnation of the deity in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, or long passages on the duties of the king declaimed by Nārada; or the elaborate discourse on creation, ethics, and liberation from rebirth by Bhiṣma in the *mokṣa-dharma* section, were interpolated into the *Mahābhārata* so that the text became more appropriate to the needs of the monarchies of the time and the new religious sects. The change to a literary form extended the social function of the composition.

Interpolations into the texts, particularly when they were transcribed gave authority to the new idea, and although it suggests the centrality of literacy, it also points to legitimation for the new idea being sought from what was regarded originally as the more prestigious oral tradition. The major variant versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* also reflect the incorporation of particular needs.[11] Thus the Buddhist *Dasaratha Jātaka* retells the story of the Ayodhyākaṇḍa, with the major difference that Rāma and Sītā are brother and sister, in conformity with the Buddhist origin myths of the Śākyas and other high-ranking clans. In the Jaina Rāmāyaṇa of Vimalasūri, the *Paumacariyam,* the picture of exile changes, for the vast forest in the area of exile often recedes and is replaced by kingdoms, the urban and the courtly culture being more familiar to the adherents of Jainism.

The interface between the oral and the literate is further demonstrated in the institution of learning known as the *guru–śiṣya paramparā*. Here again it is popularly associated with a retreat in the forest where primitive living conditions are combined with sophisticated learning in Sanskrit. It is as well to remember that the same institution prevailed even for applied knowledge, except that there were some differences when the knowledge consisted of formal learning and when it was intended as the learning of a technique towards a profession. Boys of the upper castes who were sent to *gurus* for formal education went through a process of decontextualisation when they left home. But the training was to fit them for functioning in the upper caste professions. In the forest hermitage the training was largely oral although it included familiarity with the major texts as well as practical training. When the *Rāmāyaṇa* speaks of those who are learned it refers to them as *bahuśruta*[12] that is, well-versed in oral learning. The theory of the four stages of life, the *āśramas,* in which the period of studentship was followed by that of the householder, brought the functional aspect back into the life of the trainee. In the case of boys learning a craft, the degree of decontextualisation was far less if at all, since this training was either in the house or in the guild, which was not an unfamiliar environment.

The *guru–śiṣya paramparā* was in origin an oral training. It would be interesting to visualise the change when it turns to literacy. In the dialogue between the teacher and the pupil there would be the intervention of the text which may have become the third participant in a trilogue. Does the text take the form of an alternative authority as an embodiment of knowledge? Does the crystallisation of knowledge into a text make it so sacrosanct that it cannot be challenged? Or is the interpretation of the text by the teacher to the pupil the continuation of a dialogue, in which the text plays a minor role? An analysis of the pedagogy of this tradition, a tradition which still obtains in many centres of Sanskrit learning would be very revealing in explaining the transmission of knowledge. The persistence of oral memorising of certain branches of knowledge or the dichotomy of what is taught orally and what through literacy and why, would be of significance.

The change from oral to literate is reflected even in indirect ways such as in what constituted authoritative predecessors. In the *Upaniṣads* the legitimacy of the teacher is established by reciting the *vaṃśa* or succession of teachers. This provides depth in time as well as status and does not have to be factual as is clear from the anomalies in the succession lists. But the emphasis is heavily on the teacher. With the establishment of literacy there is a shift to include together with the list of teachers various categories of texts, as is indicated in the opening section of Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*.

The location of learning also gradually shifts. The *āśramas* of the *guru* became more elaborate settlements often on the edges of towns and villages in touch with everyday society. The towns were also centres of literacy where many of the patrons of formal learning resided. By the late first millennium AD, when learned *brāhmaṇas* were recipients of handsome grants of land from royalty, the centres of learning were often concentrated in such settlements characterised by wealth and prestige. The *agrahāras* of these times were different in nature and function from the forest settlements of earlier periods. Here there was a different kind of institutionalising of knowledge with much that concerned abstract thought, sophistry and language as the articulation of the subtle mind. This was not accidental in a situation where Brahmanical learning in many parts of the country was at a premium even for the seemingly mundane affairs of legitimising political power, controlling economic resources and maintaining the social hierarchy. The growth of large and wealthy temples of the same period introduced the institutions where the educating of priests became a more systematic process. By this time the oral and the literate tradition were complementary at one level, but at another, the literate tradition was regarded as the more prestigious.

Literacy it is maintained is the product of cities. It arises from a need for record keeping in the institutions of urban life. The records related to property both individual items and generalised property. Writing was also used for identifying persons at far remove, whether by designation and status or by a corporate group: the identity being necessary in the process of exchange.

The earliest Indian script is of course the as yet undeciphered Harappa script, generally described as pictographic. The pictographic nature could suggest that it catered to more than a single language group and this would not be unusual in a situation where a script is used primarily in commercial enterprise. Its frequency on seals identifying goods, on jars used for storage and transport, with some indication of measure and identity, and infrequently on amulets, points to a largely commercial use.

There is so far no acceptable evidence to provide a link between the Harappan script and the earliest Indian alphabetic-phonetic script, Brāhmī. The Aśokan inscriptions dating to the third century BC provide the earliest evidence of the use of the Brāhmī script. Allowing for at least a half century of literacy prior to the inscriptions, it can be pushed back to the fourth century BC. The evolution of the Brāhmī script is best seen in the context of the Iranian Aramaic and the South Semitic scripts with which it has affinities and its emergence seems tied to trade. The adoption of a common script strengthens ethnic and linguistic ties and an alphabetic script pegs down the phonetics of a language. Just after the script was introduced we also have the extraordinary text of Pāṇini, systematising the grammar of currently spoken Sanskrit. Pāṇini refers to a script[13] and presumably the reference is not merely to Aramaic but to a script used for Sanskrit as well. If a written form is a requirement for a detailed grammar then one can assume that Sanskrit had such a form by the early fourth century, the date generally assumed for Pāṇini. But both the pithiness of the *sūtra* form in which the text is composed and the emphasis on phonetics would suggest a continuing concern with memorising and sound. It is generally believed that his reason for composing the grammar was to systematise the current language of the north-west (which was incidentally not the language of the Vedic texts) and thus perhaps prevent further intrusions of non-Aryan linguistic forms which are apparent in Vedic Sanskrit. The existence of etymological texts was not sufficient to explain the changes inevitable in a language of some common usage. Later grammarians tended to treat Pāṇini's grammar as prescriptive and a sufficiently detailed analysis of grammatical change is rare. Literacy in this case acted almost as a fetter. Nevertheless the existence of a grammar made the correctly used language more available to non-Aryan speakers whilst at the same time encouraging the use of the language for more complex thought. It might be interesting to speculate on the direction which Sanskrit could have taken had there been an absence of Pāṇini's grammar.

The use of a script coincided with the increase of trade in northern India and references to promissory notes, letters of credit, records of items produced and exchanged, not to mention usury, are suggestive of the close association of trade and literacy. If literacy began in the culture of cities and commerce, then it would seem that early Brahmanical attitudes to literacy were equivocal. The early *dharma-sūtras* are hostile to urban living and cities are visualised as centres of vice where the ritual prescriptions are not observed. This may also have had to do with cities supporting what have been called the 'heterodox sects'. The good *snātaka* therefore is discouraged from going to the *nagara*. Was this also because learning in the *āśramas* was still largely oral and the student, in spite of his long years of training, was not properly equipped to deal with literate activity?

Mauryan administration provides one dimension of the use of literacy, namely, an aspect of a complex administration and possibly more authoritarian than in situations where a script is absent. Written orders are always less negotiable than oral commands. Rights and obligations also tend to be more clearly stated. It is however unlikely that written orders were issued at all levels of Mauryan administration. Probably these were restricted to the upper levels and more so to orders going from the capital to the provincial centres.

Kauṭilya in the *Arthaśāstra* is clear that the upper levels of the administration should be from the upper castes, preferably *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas*. Yet the backbone of the administration, the scribes, accountants and record-keepers, had an ambiguous social status. From the first millennium AD, this work began to be manned both by the literate *brāhmaṇas* and by the *kāyasthas* who became a powerful caste in the period after the seventh century AD when scribal functions and the recording of grants and administrative rights increased enormously. There always remained a clear social distinction between the *brāhmaṇa* and the *kāyastha*, even though both were concerned with the function of literacy.[14] Access to literacy and the professional use of literacy was therefore not sufficient to establish social status even at a time when literacy was at a premium. Nevertheless, literacy was associated with levels of power and if the *kāyastha* as scribe was not as respected as the *brāhmaṇa*, his distance from the lower castes was based on both the power of administrative functions and literacy.

One of the most extensive areas for the use of literacy was the writing of inscriptions. These were statements of the present intended for the future as well. The inscription was to be a permanent record, to last, it is said, 'as long as the moon and the sun endure'. Many inscriptions were proclamatory in character such as the votive inscriptions at the sites of many Buddhist *stūpas*, informing us of who were the donors. These were frequently artisans, traders and small-scale landowners. Other inscriptions on copper-plates, or on the walls of temples, were legal documents as they were charters of grants of land. Such inscriptions are very precisely dated in contrast to the rather vague chronology of other texts. The identity of the donor and the donee is established, the location and details of the land donated, the right and obligations of the donee, the witnesses and the sanction of the authority making the donation. Some of the contents refer to technical terms, not only for the measurement of land, but also for precise rights and obligations, on the meaning of which there is still a debate. Such technical terms occur in these charters from various parts of the subcontinent and appear to have been uniformly understood. In some cases the inscriptions are bilingual, where the eulogy on the ruler and the grant is in Sanskrit but the technical data is in the regional language. Literacy by now had not only spread to a wider reach of people, but it had also become an important adjunct to establishing the alienation of property.

Such inscriptions, as documents of contract, seem to draw entirely on a situation of literacy. Yet they also contain a reference to the oral tradition, one that is more fully included in the *vaṁśāvalīs*, chronicles, of the same period. These reflect changing attitudes to the past. The *vaṁśāvalī* reflects a process of state formation with attendant social change.[15] But the past is no longer restricted to legends incorporating change or orally remembered patterns of descent groups. The oral material is restructured into a form which can be used for emerging dynasties, large and small, to assist the process of state formation. New dynasties take pride in establishing their social origins, linking themselves with the established royal lines. The written form, whether as a statement of origins in the inscription or the *vaṁśāvalī*, authored by learned *brāhmaṇas*, makes this link firmer than it was in the oral tradition of the bards. Yet the structure of the oral tradition is retained so that the legitimacy of the earlier and familiar form can also be drawn upon. This is then followed by the inclusion of a record of recent events. Since the written form is relatively less difficult to tamper with, these records come to be treated as historical. The composition of the *vaṃśāvalī* is repeated in the various new kingdoms and becomes a genre on its own.

The transition from oral to literate is also reflected in the teaching of various religious sects. Many started as popular movements using the local language for discourse and worship and the teaching is preserved in that language. Some such as the Śākta sects, often associated with popular cults, composed texts in Sanskrit which may have been an expression of upward mobility. Yet curiously in the Indian religious tradition, even after the recording of religious narrative and discourse in a literate form, the centrality of 'the book' to belief and worship is limited. The major departure came late, in Sikhism, and that too probably under the influence of Islam. Even Brahmanism, viewed later as the religion of the Vedic texts is rooted in *śruti*, that which is heard, and *smṛti*, that which is memorised. Some of the Bhakti sects focused on the *Bhagvad-Gītā*, but it was their interpretation of the text rather than the text itself which was of significance. The centrality of the *Gītā* as possibly 'the book' of Hinduism dates to recent times. This would at one level have to do with theology and doctrine. But one may also consider the nature of Indian society where the separate identities of social groups were at a premium in various ways, particularly in the link of caste with sect.

Even those Indian religions which used literacy more extensively from an early period, seem to have avoided the centrality of 'the book', characteristic of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions. The Buddhist canon in particular came to be written as Buddhism gained greater patronage from a variety of social groups. It has been argued that this had to do with the close interaction between Buddhism and its widespread patronage from the trading community with its functional use of literacy.

But it also has to do with the nature of Buddhist institutions and organisation. When schisms occurred among the monks on the veracity of the interpretation of the doctrine, a series of councils were called and the interpretation clarified. Since this led to splinter sects in the *saṅgha*, some versions at least of the debated doctrine were recorded in a written form to ensure permanency. These incorporated the justification for particular interpretations as well as the organisation of the *saṅgha*. Inevitably, therefore, they recorded the history of the teaching as viewed by that sect. Such texts were carefully preserved, copied and handed down through generations of monks. Literacy therefore not only became an important qualification of the monk but was also required for the legitimation of the sect. It became doubly necessary for purposes of record keeping and accountancy, when monastic institutions linked to these sects became property holders through grants of land from royalty and wealthy patrons. Monasteries such as Nalanda were maintained on the revenue of anywhere between a hundred and two hundred villages.[16] The handling of such an income required considerable financial and administrative expertise and it is not surprising that some monks began to specialise in this kind of work. Max Weber has said that the 'rationality' of writing which is an economic rationality, is located in the heart of religious institutions concerned with the non-rational. But it needs to be remembered that the function of literacy in such institutions was not limited to the non-rational.

The period when literacy was beginning to expand from the fifth-fourth century BC onwards, witnessed a major phase of intellectual speculation. This is not to suggest that the speculation would not have existed without literacy, since the Upaniṣadic thought which preceded it, appears to have been prior to literacy. But the form in which the discussion was recorded suggests the movement from speculation to philosophy. Earlier discussion had emanated from forest retreats, the courts of *rājās* as well as from another institution very pertinent to the times, the *kutūhala-śālās*.[17] These were groves and parks on the edge of the towns where people gathered for amusement as well as to hear the discourses of a variety of teachers, many of them peripatetic. There is a striking similarity to the olive grove of Academus outside Athens, which was frequented by Plato and a variety of Greek sophists. It was in the *kutūhala-śālās* that the views of various teachers were discussed, elaborated upon and refined.

The record of earlier discussions tended to be situational, where narrative often introduced an idea, the narrative acting as a mnemonic device. The gradual change to a literary form encouraged the process of more abstract thought where the construction of ideas and meaning were more carefully analysed. This was similar to the experience of other cultures in the initial stages of literacy.[18] Philosophical interests concerned with theories of knowledge often focussed on rationality and logic, *tarka* and *nyāya*, which although expressed in literary form nevertheless echo to some degree the earlier oral form.

One of the most interesting aspects of this speculation was the particular patterns of debate and methods of analysis which grew out of both the oral and literary tradition of these times. It has been argued that the evolution of these required literary learning, and to that extent moved away from the oral tradition. But this may need reconsideration. The simplest of these forms, the one directly concerned with the philosopher's search for truth, also referred to as *vāda*, was described in later texts as wholesome discussion.[19] In this it was assumed that initially there were two views. That of the proponent was stated and was then countered by that of the opponent. The aim was to find the correct position through the use of reasoning, logic and the accredited means of knowledge. This third position would then approximate to the truth. As a technique of discussion and analysis it permits of arguments from the two opposing positions to be brought into the third position. It concedes that there may be an overlap from either the first or the second position. Was the system of what has sometimes been referred to as a form of dialectic in *vāda*, based on the structure of oral dialogue? Literacy would presume a familiarity with the first statement read prior to its refutation. Oral dialogue requires that the first statement be reiterated even in its refutation. Oral discussion also assumed the possibility of a variety of world views without necessarily declaring one among them as exclusive.

I have so far spoken of texts which reflect a continuity from the oral tradition even if these were converted to literate forms and therefore ceased to be oral. I would like to turn briefly to the other aspect of the link between oral and literate, and look at the kind of knowledge which is initially entirely oral and is regarded with some contempt by at least a section of those who are literate, but which at an opportune moment is converted to literate form. This was evident in areas of applied knowledge, frequently dismissed as technology, and particularly apparent in the two examples which I would like to refer to, the profession of building and the practice of medicine.

Apprenticeship to special professions developed as a parallel stream in the transmission of knowledge. Orally handed down knowledge can perhaps be seen as a form of proto-science. It involved touching, manipulating, observing and systematising. The practitioner began as an apprentice and learnt by practice and application and of course by reflecting on the technique and the problem. The carpenter working on an ox-cart commanded a different degree of knowledge from the carpenter working on a wooden building, where vaulted ceilings were common and which demanded a calculation of stress, durability and structure. A change of medium such as the shift from wood to brick or to stone, required different calculations, as do the structural changes introduced into a building.

Some craftsmen worked on their own and others belonged to a guild and guilds were common by the Christian era. The technology of the profession was taught through apprenticeship. Recruitment often drew on the children of the craftsmen in the guild, sometimes leading to the guild becoming a *jāti*. The identity of the guild was such that its own social practice, or *śreṇī-dharma*, was a recognised feature.[20] Artisans employed by the state were paid salaries which were barely adequate, being considerably lower than those of soldiers and clerks. This may also have encouraged the formation of guilds. But the prosperity of artisans and guilds underwent a considerable improvement at the turn of the Christian era, when with expanded trade, the guild became a major institution of urban life and artisans and guilds were among the patrons of architecture.

The construction of the earliest buildings are generally associated with Buddhist monuments. Guilds of craftsmen are among those responsible for these structures and on occasion, the guild is also a donor, contributing to the construction of the monument.[21] The builders do not appear initially to have had manuals. There are however references to Buddhist monks supervising these buildings and the monks would have been literate. In the construction of the early temples use was made of the existing expertise and of artisans who maintained their knowledge through practice.

With the gradual and increasing complexity in the techniques of construction and the structures to be built, two changes become apparent: one is the reference to greater specialisation and the other to texts relating to the profession of building. Specific terms for builders and artisans became more common. Thus there are references to the *śilpin* and the *rūpakāra* and also to the *sūtradhāra* and the *sthapati*.[22] The term *sūtradhāra* had many levels of meaning. Its literal meaning, 'the holder of the thread' can refer to the one who directs an enterprise. It can also be interpreted as the one who knows the *sūtras*, in this case the *śilpaśāstras*, the texts on architecture and the arts. These texts written in Sanskrit, generally date to the early second millennium AD. Some *sūtradhāras* are also described as authors of texts. This would imply formal education as a qualification. They are required to be well-versed in the theoretical aspects of construction. A separation came to be established between the artisan and the one who planned and supervised the building. The *sūtradhāras* are mentioned by name, either individually, such as Sri Yugandhāra at Ajanta,[23] or by family such as the Kokasa family in the Kalacuri inscriptions.[24] The reference to three generations of the same family would suggest that at the level of the *sūtradhāra* and the *sthapati* at least, the guild system was of lesser importance by now and that individuals belonging to established families were employed for the overseeing of major buildings. Were the authors of the texts *brāhmaṇas* who had decided to move into writing books on subjects earlier thought to refer to low status professions, or, did these authors come from artisanal backgrounds of wealth and standing who had had access to formal education and wished to write texts on their professional work? That the writing of a *śilpaśāstra* was regarded as high status activity is evident, else the versatile *rājā* Bhoj would not have associated his name with such a text. That textual knowledge of architecture was required is also evident from the proliferation of temple building at the period when the *śilpaśāstras* appear and the fact that temples were now more complex structures where at least the planning required some knowledge of mathematics and engineering. The separation between the theorist and the practitioner raises yet another question. Where did innovation lie? in the practical work of the skilled artisan or in the theory? Did innovation by-pass the *śāstras* or did the *śāstras* stultify knowledge? Or did the text on professional knowledge act as the means of making this knowledge accessible to many more than in its oral form? Such changes relate both to the technology of the craft as well as the status of the artisan. The *dharmaśāstras* and the *Arthaśāstra* place all artisans in a low status, generally that of a *śūdra* and therefore little detail is available on the transmission of knowledge among such professions. Some of this will have to be reconstructed from the technology. We are told that a *brāhmaṇa* living by a craft is to be treated as a *śūdra* presumably to discourage *brāhmaṇas* from taking up these occupations, and this inspite of the Buddhist *Jātaka* stories referring to *brāhmaṇa* carpenters and weavers. It is not for nothing that

Sarasvatī remained a first order deity whereas the pre-eminence of Viśvakarma was gradually lowered. From the perspective of the status of the professions, two interesting developments occur in the first millennium AD. One was the gradual distinction introduced between the artisan and the supervisor and the other was the mention even of craftsmen by name. This first occurs in inscriptions from Mathura referring to Kunika and his pupils.[25] The introduction of a name may suggest a claim for a particular *guru–śiṣya paramparā* or even a guild and where the object produced was of superior quality it would act as an advertisement. As long as the guild was powerful there would be a tendency for knowledge to remain among its members. Where there was a gradual breaking up of guilds the artisan once again was left to his devices. This possibly led to the emergence of the *sthapati* and the *sūtradhāra* as managers and controllers of artisanal activity and this management was further articulated in the authorship of texts relating to the knowledge of building techniques. That the text related to the building and embellishment of temples doubtless gave the activity greater prestige than for example, the scribal work of the *kāyastha*.

This kind of change is also reflected in the practice of medicine. In the social hierarchy endorsed by Brahmanism, physicians are rated as inferior for they not only worked with their hands but also handled the pollution of the sick. There might even have been the contempt of the literati for those who claim to cure, to remove disease and to save the dying from death. But the physician in Buddhist texts is often a respected and wealthy man who has been carefully trained in his profession. This training is at least on one occasion associated with the town of Taxila in the north-west,[26] interestingly the same area where, in a later period, the famous medical treatise of Caraka was composed. Both this and the later text of Suśruta, written in Sanskrit, epitomise the current knowledge of medicine and give substantial space to empirical technique and practice. The major contribution of these texts is in the field of surgery. Applied, oral knowledge therefore has a premium in the written form. Putting this knowledge into literate form may have been motivated by the need to control it. It has been suggested that the Buddhist monk as a kind of lay doctor had considerable expertise and some of the theoretical work may have drawn from this expertise.[27] It could also be that in this particular region there was a currency of Greek medicine and the Greeks had well-defined views on medicine with which the Indian views agreed at times and sometimes differed. It could therefore have been an effort to systematise a particular view and give it currency.

The classification and systemising of this knowledge in a literary form occurred when control over that knowledge was of advantage to those who had access to a literary form. Resort to a literary form also occurs when knowledge becomes so complex that it cannot be handled by oral techniques. Thus both the social constraints of literacy as well as the nature of knowledge in any field, influence the transition from oral to literate.

My attempt in this lecture is more than merely to state the dichotomy between applied knowledge deriving from an oral tradition and theoretical knowledge based on literacy. It is rather to point to the integration of the oral and the written. I have tried to suggest that in many areas of Indian experience from the early past the literate did not shut out the oral. In fact it often drew from oral sources. Further, that the deliberate insistence on the continuation of the oral tradition, as in the case of Vedic compositions, had a purpose and function quite distinct from the fact that such compositions were also recorded in written from. Ritual language can have a permanence almost akin to literacy. In such a situation the oral tradition had a social and intellectual role other than that of being a system of transmitting knowledge. An understanding of these distinctive roles even within the oral tradition needs underlining.

This may help us to understand a little better the processes involved in educating ourselves, whether it be presuppositions or concerns or techniques and their links with the past. My own experience in pedagogy has been an extremely limited one, that of writing textbooks on history for middle schools. I do know however that where these books have been backed by a discussion of the text and by a demonstration of the varieties of evidence used by historians, the impact of the textbook has been far greater than where it is treated, incorrectly, as a received text. Where there is an attempt to see the world around one as historically evolved there even history ceases to be viewed as a series of static states into which fresh items are periodically introduced. It takes on a more vibrant character.

Education one hopes should not be a trauma. So, if certain usages drawing from the oral tradition are current then perhaps it would be worthwhile to see if they can be utilised in the process of learning. This requires us to understand that the oral should not be equated with backwardness but should be seen as complementary and in some areas of learning, as essential. Perhaps we need to emphasise the importance of the oral process at particular stages of learning and the difference between what is better learnt orally and what through writing. In a sense the use of the audio-visual mechanism of communication is a partial return to the oral, with however the important difference that there is no dialogue. The usual separation between the literate and the oral where the literate is regarded as the hegemonic learning and the oral as the popular, diluted form, does not necessarily hold. The oral can be as hegemonic when it is legitimising a status or a function as I have tried to show with reference to the *vaṃśāvalī* tradition. There is however the danger that the oral can also descend into a catechism if it is not judiciously juxtaposed with the literate.

In a system where the oral and the literate are seen as complementary, there would perhaps not be the tendency to treat the written invariably as undeniable fact. In a culture where the oral remains strong, if literacy is imposed without integrating it to an oral tradition, the imposition may remain alien. What is required perhaps is a shift from viewing the oral and literate as part of a bicameral mind to seeing it as an integrated cultural expression.

Notes and References

* Basu Memorial Lecture, CIE, Delhi University, 1988.

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5

*Dissent and Protest in the Early Indian Tradition**

For many decades now it has been maintained that Indian civilization has shown an absence of dissent and protest. This has become so axiomatic on the Indian past that those who have occasionally questioned it have been labelled as anti-Indian. Such a view stems from a nationalistic oversimplification of Indian society as a vision of harmonious social relations in a land of plenty. Superimposed on this were the preconceptions of idealist philosophy that dissent required materialistic underpinnings, and philosophical themes of materialism in Indian thought have generally received short shrift from contemporary commentators. It is only in recent years that some attempts are being made to suggest that neither materialist philosophy nor dissent were wholly marginal to Indian society.[1] It still remains fashionable in some circles to deny the opposition between forms of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the ideological traditions of the past, arguing that Indian religions were not based on dogma.[2] Yet the history of groups identified as having a community of religious beliefs, rituals and behaviour, among Buddhists, Jainas, Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas and Tantrics, is strewn with sectarian dogmatism which found expression not only in interreligious but also in inter-sectarian rivalries, sometimes of a violent kind.

It has also been argued that there are no words equivalent in meaning to dissent and protest in the early Indian tradition; however there is no shortage of terms connoting what is implicit in the concept. Words for dissent and non-conformity such as *vibheda*, *vimati*, *asammati*, *viparitta*, *ananukūla*, are described by modern commentators as negative constructions and therefore alien to the language. The same can be said for words such as *dissent* and *non-conformity* which are also derived from negative constructions. What is of historical significance is not so much the syntactical structure of these words but the particular period and the historical context in which they find expression. In any case these terms are new in their specific use in other civilisations as well. The secularisation of the adaptation of terms such as dissent and protest is a relatively recent phenomenon, but this does not preclude the occurrence of actions of dissent and protest in earlier times. Dissenting actions whether symbolic or overt, may not be consciously described as dissent, yet the dissent may be implicit in the nature of the action.

Dissent can be limited to questioning established ideologies or belief-systems, becoming the core of a new ideology. The expression of dissent can thus be relatively confined until such time as it mobilises action. Protest, therefore, involves more than dissent; it requires ideology, mobilisation and clearly defined action. The action has to be legitimate for the groups using it and is often regarded as illegitimate by those whose views are being questioned. The recognition of a protesting group is therefore a gradual process in history and occurs only when such a group has gathered social force and has become, as it were, politicised. This often coincided with the acquisition of property and the establishment of relations with political authority; which, incidentally, frequently became a point of departure in that it brought about opposition within its ranks to the new situation. Conflicting views over the acceptance of property and involvement in society could be a cause for friction. Among the well-endowed sects, there were rivalries over succession to office which entailed the management of property. Whatever the reasons, breakaway groups justified the schism by appeal to doctrine.

It would seem self-evident that any society which is complex and registers change, as has been the case with Indian society, must also register ideas of dissent, protest and non-conformity; otherwise the very fact of change would be nullified. Protest and dissent are not always expressed through violent action and there is normally a large spectrum ranging from a rather passive non-conformity to violence. Equally essential is the mechanism for containing dissent and protest, which tries to avoid the disruption of society.

During the first millennium BC when the early Indian tradition was being formulated, evidence of overt oppositions is limited. But the expression of dissent through the questioning or even flouting of social norms is conspicuous. Sometimes it took the form of opinion systematised in the views of religious and philosophical sects; but it was also expressed through symbol and action. This often occurred in the form of opting out of society as it were, through various types of renunciation. But not all of these can be seen as protest. Some were attempts at seeking individual salvation and had therefore an other-worldly orientation. Only those forms can be regarded as expression of dissent which satisfy certain criteria. Opposition to existing social norms had to be consciously maintained even if it was expressed at a symbolic level; the new forms could become alternate sources of power; and the attempt was not so much to disrupt the existing system as to set up a parallel or alternate system. These criteria are a necessary pre-condition. Not all renouncers were or are protesters, for there are many in the past and even today, who, rather than utilising renunciation as a technique of dissent, exploited it for mundane ends.

One of the paradoxes of the Indian tradition is that the renouncer, in spite of migrating out of society, remains a symbol of authority within society. An explanation of this paradox may emerge from an analysis of the social role of the renouncer. Apart from those who through austerity and severe discipline, both mental and physical, sought extrasensory power, there were many others who renounced their social obligations, joined an order and far from propagating a life-negating principle, sought to establish an alternate or parallel society. They combined in themselves the charisma of the renouncer as well as the concerns of social and occasionally political dissent. They were neither revolutionaries nor radical reformers; they can perhaps best be described, as I have argued elsewhere, as the makers of a counter-culture.[3] Their migration is symbolic since they re-enter the social arena in a changed form. Such forms of renunciation were open to all. It was generally assumed however that members of the higher castes and upper levels of society would use this as their form of dissent. For those lower down, migration was rarely symbolic for it carried the bitterness of necessity. Some who joined the renunciatory orders were attempting to overcome the inequities of caste status by joining non-caste groups. Others, such as the peasants, were sometimes forced to migrate to express their discontent. I would like to examine more closely the evidence for the two ends of the spectrum: the open renunciatory groups and their relations with society, taking the case of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, and at the other end the specific limited group of the peasantry who, when they migrated, were articulating a particular discontent.

The first millennium BC is characterised by changes of at least three kinds which had a bearing on the realm of ideas. These changes were the evolving of a recognised social stratification, the emergence of towns and urban centres and, lastly, adjustments to the increasing authority of the state. It is with reference to these that I would like to consider the question of dissent.

Social stratification assumes divergent forms in different systems. In the monarchies frequent reference is made to castes functioning in the framework of the fourfold *varṇa* system. Within the hierarchy of this system the elevation of the *brāhmaṇas* brought, as its counter-poise, the new category later referred to as untouchables. The hierarchy of the fourfold system was based on the distribution of power, authority and access to economic wealth (whether in heads of cattle or in land) and kinship networks. The fact of untouchability highlights an additional feature—the distinction being justified on the basis of ritual purity and pollution which converted the *caṇḍālas* and other such categories into excluded groups. The oligarchies or chiefships do not register a four caste stratification to begin with, but here the emphasis separated the landowning *kṣatriyas* of the *rājakula* from other clan members[4] and these in turn from the slaves and labourers, *dāsa-bhṛtaka*, who worked the land.[5]

With the extension of agriculture, the growth of centres of craft production leading to networks of trade and the increasing political authority of the state, urban centres became a recognisable feature of the cultural topography. Most of them combined the function of capitals of the newly emergent states, the earlier *janapadas*, as well as centres of trade. Although the rural-urban nexus remained strong, the urban ethos was different. Urban centres provide evidence of a stratification in which the *seṭṭhi*, the merchant and trader was regarded as important. Towns were looked upon with some suspicion by the *brāhmaṇas* who declared that the good *snātaka* should avoid living in such places.[6] Evidently social taboos were liable to be eroded in the flux of urban life. The bulk of urban society consisted of those who laboured either as artisans or as wage-earners in commodity production, constituents of the amorphous category described as *śūdras* in the texts.[7]

This was also the period which saw the establishment of the state as embodying the necessary authority for the maintenance of law and order and for the protection of the people. In theory, the state, whether it took the form of a monarchy or an oligarchy, is an alternative to an otherwise nightmarish chaos. The *Mahābhārata* compares the kingless state to the lawless condition of the desiccated tank in which the big fish devour the little fish.[8] The *Rāmāyaṇa* paints a distressing picture of the afflictions which beset a land without a king.[9] Drought is almost by implication associated with bad government or no government. Buddhist texts are equally graphic in depicting civil strife in the absence of a state.[10] The state was seen as an enforced necessity rather than a naturally evolved institution and the element of contract is implicit to a lesser or greater degree in most of these explanations of the origin of the state, irrespective of whether the state came about through divine intervention or the choice of the people. Whatever its origins, the state as representing political authority was new to the earlier lineage identity now being gradually weakened. In the monarchies the concentration of political authority was strengthened by religious sanction through a range of rituals such as those linked to status and power as in the *rājasūya*, *vājapeya* and *aśvamedha* in particular.

These trends incorporating social stratification, the power of the state and the economic thrust of the extension of agrarian systems and trade, became the substratum of historical activity in subsequent centuries as well. States expanded outwards from geographically nuclear regions, tribes and occupational groups were converted into castes, waste land was cleared for cultivation, new routes were forged and markets for trade, and this process provided a continuing historical momentum in the subcontinent up until recent centuries. This is in part reflected in the constant emphasis on the fear of chaos in the texts of later centuries. The emphasis did not arise from a paranoia regarding disorder but rather reflects the repeated formation of states in new areas which had on each occasion to be justified. State formation is a recognisable feature of historical change in the Indian subcontinent during the millennia AD. This necessitated highlighting the difference between the conditions within a state and non-state societies. Contrasting of chaos with order was part of the required emphasis on the sanction of the state, its legal authority often equivalent to coercion, which was summed up in the word *daṇḍa*. The literal meaning of *daṇḍa*, 'the rod' was not limited in connotation to physical force alone but was symbolic of all authoritarian sanctions which the state could use and which were essential to the functioning of the state. Significantly the legal codes included a comment on all the minutiae of social and political life because the *dharmaśāstras* were again the primary texts of state legitimation. The stress on consensus in matters relating to law was in part due to the continuing authority of customary law and in part the absence of a uniform code. The sanction of the state therefore was endorsed by the appeal to a multiplicity of laws arising out of the separation of *varṇas, śreṇīs, jātis, janas,* which were sought to be ordered within the *varṇa* framework. The emphasis was on the disparate but coherent functioning of these various identities rather than a universal law to cover all identities.

The earliest expression of at least minimal dissent comes to us from the *Upaniṣads* in the earlier part of the first millennium BC. The search for a way to ensure liberation from rebirth and a better comprehension of man in the universe led to a questioning of the efficacy of existing forms such as the sacrificial ritual and a discussion of alternative techniques such as *yoga, tapas, dhyāna*. These have generally been interpreted as procedures for attaining *mokṣa* or liberation. Yet embedded in this debate is a call away from social mores; a non-conformity which is expressed through renunciation and migration to the forest. That acquisition of knowledge required a distance from society is in itself a rejection of conformity. Those that concerned themselves with such ideas were a restricted group and their autonomy and isolation was respected.

The more apparent social tensions and differences were doubtless resolved more easily in a society which was characterised by a smaller hierarchy of stratification, with fewer economic disparities in a pastoral-cum-agrarian system and with the authority of the over-arching state still to come. The margin for non-conformity in such societies is limited. Migration to the forest was at one level symbolic but at the practical level the absence of a vast social surplus made it easier to live off nature than off the village. This perhaps partially explains why renunciation is by and large alien to the *Ṛg Veda* and becomes important only in the more complex society of the later Vedic period. In the earlier society there is one category of persons who had the licence at least to indirectly comment on conformity; these were the poet-bards. Their expression of dissent took the very subtle form of gentle mockery to which even the gods were not immune. But their power lay in their eulogy of those heroes who were munificent gift-givers and in this the heroic chiefs may have made efforts to appease them.[11] This relationship is seen even more clearly in the earliest Tamil literature, the Śangam.[12] But the increasing importance of renunciation weakened the freedom of the bards and the renouncer gradually became the key figure associated with dissent.

A concession to these ideas is evident in the theory of the four *āśramas*, the four stages of life, where the dichotomy of observing social norms as symbolised in the householder/*gṛhasthin* is in opposition to the opting out of society, that of the renouncer/*saṃnyāsin*. That the theory of the four *āśramas* functioned to some extent as a safety valve would seem evident from the placing of *saṃnyāsa* in old age, after the completion of social obligations. The symbols of the renouncer such as matted hair, nakedness or the wearing of an animal skin, the breaking of food taboos, celibacy and the discarding of all possessions ran counter to social obligations. The dissenter was thus symbolically placed outside society but was not regarded as an outcast since the act of opting out was believed to imbue him with power. The source of power was the claim to extraordinary bodily control, magical and extra-sensory knowledge, heightened energy and philosophical perception. All these went toward creating a charisma around those who practised and claimed these powers and gave them an authority which was difficult to explain in mundane terms. In time, the dissent became muted or even in many cases disappeared, but the authority remained, giving strength to the parallel system. That the actions and views of some renouncers were looked upon as a critique of society is evident from one of the late *Upaniṣads*, the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*.[13] It carries a list of the impediments to knowledge which include mendicants, the pupils of the *śūdras*, those of knotted hair (*cāṭa-jaṭa*), those who wear the red robe and those who falsely argue against the *Vedas*. Among the renouncers there were dissensions ranging over degrees of conformity. The mere fact of being a renouncer did however imbue the person with authority in the eyes of the others.

The same authority gave direction to the protest at the individual level in later times in the practice of *dharnā*. But behind the act of dissent by the individual lay the sanction of society and tradition. *Dharnā* carries the connotation of a technique of confrontation in which an attempt is made to pressure a person through sheer will, persistence and an appeal to ethics rather than violence. The participants and the desired aim become interlocked in a process of attrition in which the intangible force of the cause can be converted into an ethical issue, a conversion which becomes more successful if it takes on the character of ascetic austerity and practice. The act of *dharnā* carries the suggestion both of confrontation as well as the mobilisation of an ethical appeal. *Dharnā* was used to considerable effect in the second millennium AD by the *cārans*, the bards of Rajasthan. In conformity with bardic tradition they were inviolate as were the *sūtas* of earlier times.[14] A *dharnā* by a *cāran* therefore carried the risk for the king against whom the *dharnā* was directed, of his being held responsible for the *cāran's* death.[15]

Not all the early renouncers chose to remain in isolation. Some among them returned to the margins of society and became the familiar mendicant wanderers, the *parivrājakas*. However, the larger and settled communities of monks emerged in times of a more developed economy, when such communities could be supported by rich villages and urban centres through alms-giving. The earliest monasteries were generally located in the vicinity of towns since the monks lived on alms and donations;[16] some were located along trade routes where travellers and merchants could use them as staging points and donations were again welcome.[17] In still later times when endowments of land constituted the more substantial part of donations, large monastic institutions became common in rural areas initiating a 'monastic landlordism.'[18] It is significant that such institutions were absent in areas of primitive agriculture.

The towns produced their own kind of dissenters, not all of whom became renouncers or monks.[19] Some took to philosophical acrobatics in arguments ranging from the eternalism of the soul and the world, to the notion of a first cause being irrelevant to understanding the origin of the world; the annihilationists supported the destruction of the living being and the hedonists held that the doctrine of happiness brought complete salvation.

Others were recognised by their sharp critique of society and its norms, which on occasion takes on the form of a world view of either sceptical or material philosophy. This was evident in the schools included in the category of Cārvāka and Lokāyata.[20]

These sects drew their audience from the townspeople, including debating opponents among sects similar to theirs. Some opposed not only the observance of social custom and law but the entire structure of explanation. It is this which earned them the disapprobation of those less daring in their views and less willing to give free rein to complete rationalism and unflinching materialist explanations. The teaching of such groups is largely reconstructed from quotations which are referred to as part of the refutation of incompatible views or false doctrines in the literature of the more established sects.[21] That their ideas did attract a following is evident from the vehemence with which they are attacked in this literature. In this the Indian experience was not dissimilar to that of some other early cultures. Despite the sarcasm, the theme of rationality comes through clearly.

To argue that all religious rituals and the existing rules of morality were pointless would attract the wrath of those who accepted the tangibility of these rituals and morals, even though they might have been opposed to the particular forms. Monastic orders were as governed by rites, rituals and laws as was secular society, although they took a different form and catered to different needs. The questioning of the worth of alms and offerings laid the monks as open to attack as any member of society since the monks were dependent on such forms of support. Hence the scathing criticism of such views.

There was also the fear that extreme ideas would disturb the existing order. The logic of rational explanation would have required far more than merely opting out into a parallel system: it would have required changing the very structure of society. Few of these groups established any distinct organisation and the force of their dissent tended to be dissipated in individual enterprise.

Another unchanging feature of the attack on rationalism and materialism was to describe such views as advocating a contingent morality and extreme hedonism. The familiar phrases ring out from the earliest texts with the warning that materialists do not distinguish between actions conducive to merit and those not so, since they are devoid of moral values and argue that all action has material causes and there is no reckoning after death. In spite of these attacks materialist ideas survived. The need for contradicting such views even in the form of ridicule, from time to time, was not merely a literary exercise but reflected the continuity of what were looked upon as unpalatable views. Mahendravarman's play, *Maṭṭavilāsaprahasana* carried clear attempts at ridiculing heretics. But the tradition of anti-religious philosophical texts survived as is evident from the eighth century work of Jayaraśi, the *Tattvopaplavasiṃha*.[22]

Among the other sects and groups were the Ājīvikas, the Jainas and the Buddhists. These were groups of renouncers for whom the monastery was to become an organisational base. The degree of dissent is determined both by the distance from society and by the symbols of identification. Thus to take the case of the Buddhists, the monastery was a parallel society in that it was totally different from conventional society but was not cut off, being dependent on the lay followers in villages and towns. The natural dichotomy remained that of the householder and the renouncer, expressed much more strongly in the symbols of differentiation, but the interlocking of the two also became essential.[23] This reciprocity was expressed at the symbolic level in the exchange of *dāna* for *punya*—gift-giving for merit.[24] Buddhist teaching lays stress on the distinctive roles of the monk/*bhikkhu* and the householder/*gahapati*, and the separate methods of each in the search for liberation from rebirth; but at the more mundane level of the rise of the *saṅgha*, the *bhikkhu* had to be supported by the *gahapati*. The more tangible lay support for the Buddhists came from elite groups such as royal families, landowning clans, merchants and members of the richer guilds.[25]

The negation of social obligations is clear from the encouragement given to enter the monastery as early as possible, some sects arguing that *gṛhastha-āśrama*, the householder's stage, should be altogether avoided. The breaking of caste rules lay in recruitment to the monasteries indiscriminately from all castes. The monks were required to live together and eat together thus contradicting the laws of commensality. The requirement that alms must consist of cooked food was again, for the erstwhile upper caste monk, a departure from food taboos where uncooked food was the more acceptable.[26] The taking on of a new name unconnected with caste, reiterated the attempt to negate a caste identity. The new sectarian identity was recognised outwardly by the uniformity of robes and appurtenances carried by the monks. The removal of hair was again in marked contrast to the householder and to the matted hair of the ascetic. These were symbols of an expression of dissent.

The ultimate source of power for such groups came through entry into the parallel society of the monastery. Some of the charisma of renunciation was conceded to the monks but their greater strength lay in the institutional basis of the monastery. Here an emphasis was placed on egalitarianism and the negation of hierarchy although the monasteries were by no means the ideal egalitarian sanctuaries. Ownership of property vested in the monastery and as long as this precluded the individual monk from such ownership, it encouraged a degree of equality. But even the administration of property required an administrative hierarchy which began to erode the egalitarian basis of the institution.[27] The monastery gradually acquired the dimensions of an agency which cut across caste and lineage ties. That this did not lead to confrontation and conflict with social and political authority was perhaps because of the diversion of dissent into a parallel system. But part of the answer also lies in the relationship between the monastery and political authority. Initially, Buddhist monasteries did not open their doors to officers of the state.[28] The Jaina *saṅgha* prohibited friendship between monks and the king and his officers.[29] Doubtless this was to ensure autonomy from political interference as well as to maintain the distance required for independent functioning. However the acceptance of royal patronage became the thin end of the wedge. When the endowments took the form of substantial economic largesse, the monastery was forced to accept a close relationship with political authority.

It is perhaps in this process that the term *pāṣaṇḍa* becomes crucial to the question of dissent and undergoes a change of meaning. The term occurs frequently in the Aśokan edicts where it carries the connotation of a sect with no apparent associations whether orthodox or heterodox (*savve pāsamdā, nānā pāsamdesu*, etc.).[30] In one case there is an indirect indication of not merely differences of opinion, which would be expected among sects, but even hostility since there is a plea for tolerance in permitting diverse opinions. Aśoka also refers to *bāmhanā va samana va añño pāsamdā* ...[31] (*brāhmaṇas* and *śramaṇas* and other sects). The phrase, '*brāhmaṇas* and *śramaṇas*,' as used in the edicts has generally been taken as a comprehensive reference to a variety of sects. However, another source underlines the implicit hostility of the two by providing the simile of the mongoose and the snake.[32] Megasthenes also divides the caste of philosophers, as he calls them, into two, the Brachmanes and the Sarmanes.[33] Within the Buddhist tradition the fact of sectarian belief and action and false doctrine is very powerful. Those who give false replies—*setakani vatthāni datvā*—at the Council of Pāṭalipūtra are expelled.[34] In the famous Schism Edict of Aśoka, dissident monks (*saṅghe bhettave*) and those who disrupt the *saṅgha* (*saṅgham bhakkhati*) are made to wear white clothes and expelled.[35] The sectarian developments within Buddhism and Jainism are evident from the history of the two religions, with dissenting sects breaking away and seeking to legitimise the break by arguing that it was sanctioned through a religious council. Thus many of the early major sects trace their origin to a schism at a council, the Theravāda to the Council at Pāṭalipūtra, the Śvetambara to the Council at Magadha, and so on.

The antagonism implicit between sects at the intellectual and cult level was doubtless aggravated by the fact of some becoming recipients of royal patronage. This may well have intensified the antagonism into sharp hostility where the Brahmanical groups would see non-Brahmanical sects as heretics and argue that by not conforming to social mores they were disrupting society and in any case they were identified as the preachers of false doctrines. Dissent declines when protesters become inheritors. Those excluded from the inheritance have to point to the inheritors either as having betrayed the original dissent or as being the perpetuators of false doctrines aimed at the destruction of society. The Puranic literature makes it evident that the term *pāṣaṇḍa* had changed its meaning and in later periods it is used for heretics of all kinds. A late *Purāṇa*, the *Bṛhaddharma*, illustrates this when it states that the *Pāṣaṇḍas* and *Yavanas* will destroy the *varṇāśramadharma*, create their own gods, write their *śāstras* in Prākrit and teach their own religious ideas.[36] Ultimately in still later usage the word *pākhaṇḍa* came to refer to a fraud as well. It is curious that in the Greek versions of the Aśokan edicts, 'sect' is translated as DIATRIBE, literally a discourse.[37] In its later form this word was also associated with hostility when it meant a discourse directed against a person or an idea.

The developments traced so far, involving the change in a religious group from a small number of adherents to an expansive movement incorporating sectarian growth, property relations and connections with political authority, were not restricted to the Buddhists alone. The same changes were noticeable with some variation at many times and in many areas among sects belonging to the other major religions of India, such as the Jainas, Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Tantrics and still later, Islam. The growth of the sectarian *āśrama*, and *maṭha* or the Sufi *khānqah*, many of which received grants of maintenance and land, became a normal pattern in the historical evolution of such religious sects. The changes which they underwent were, therefore, in many ways similar to those of the Buddhist monasteries of earlier times. Not all of these, however, were dissenting groups. Some attempted to consolidate what they took to be orthodoxy on the wane; but they all included the technique of building an institutional base and this inevitably required them to come to terms with political authority. Theoretically renunciation included the renouncing of material possessions, and therefore there was a necessity for those renouncers who wished to build an institutional base to have to rely on patronage; the most effective form of patronage came from royalty.

The advantage to political authority of such a relationship, quite apart from the theory that patronage bestowed merit on the patron, was that such religious institutions could become centres of loyalty and support in far flung areas. Here they acted as avenues of social acculturation and political legitimation. However, political authority had also to follow a policy of appeasement, since from the late first millennium AD onwards religious establishments also played the role of centres of secular activities[38] and this carried the danger of their becoming the nuclei of popular opposition. Not only were many religious establishments, in effect, landed intermediaries with many fingers in many economic and political pies, but in some areas they almost doubled for the political authority. The relationship between the Jagannath temple at Puri and its political counterparts in the medieval period is an excellent case in point.[39] The geographical distribution of such establishments could also encourage sectarian loyalties cutting across political loyalties. Many religious establishments served functions parallel to the state in their handling of what might be called public welfare. That the Sultans of Delhi were apprehensive of the power of Sufi *khānqahs* was part of the same syndrome. It is also not surprising that the Mughal emperors, including Aurangzeb, made donations to *brāhmaṇas* and Hindu religious establishments in certain parts of the empire.[40]

Religious sects were often the symbolic or potential carriers of dissent. The mobilisation of dissent into protest did on occasion take overt forms, and where it concerned specific issues did not require the legitimation of a belief-system. The right to revolt is central to this question.

The concentration of power in the monarchical states provided the possibility of the counter-weight of protest against such power. Recorded incidents of such protest are not too many, but the evidence does suggest that the notion was familiar. The texts tend to be contradictory on this point. Some negate the right to revolt altogether.[41] Others concede it, provided it is motivated by the desire to terminate the wickedness of the king. Wickedness is defined as acting against the laws of *dharma* and the right is therefore morally justified.[42] The *Mahābhārata* justifies the right to revolt if the king is oppressive, and even permits assassination;[43] but its incidence is such as to suggest that this action would be restricted to *brāhmaṇas*, as in the case of the wicked king Veṇa,[44] suggesting that they alone had the moral right to kill a king. Buddhist *Jātaka* literature has many more references to protest by subjects against oppressive kings (*adhamena*), some of whom are banished.[45] Where a king is put to death for a moral offence, the actual killing is at the intervention of the god Śakra.[46] The right to revolt in Buddhist texts is extended to all subjects of the kingdom, but the context indicates that frequently it was limited to the citizens of the capital.[47] The terms used are *mahājana*—a large crowd which could include the people of the countryside and the respected townspeople (*janapada negama*), *nagaravāsin* (the inhabitants of the city), *raṭṭhavāsin* (the subjects). Generally the *mahājana* gathers in the capital where the opposition to the king is expressed.

In contrast to the *Jātaka* literature, non-Buddhist sources do not concede the right to revolt to all subjects. Kautilya's perspective reflects the culmination of the state as an agency of control with monarchy as the norm. The citizens cannot revolt, but the king must ensure their welfare. Interestingly, the only revolts which are discussed are palace coups and revolts led by officers, tribal chiefs and landed intermediaries, and these inevitably have to be suppressed.[48] There are however two specific references from the Buddhist sources to the citizens of Taxila rebelling against the oppression of the officials of the Mauryan administration.[49] The source of power in this category of protests lay in the fear that the revolt of the subjects would destroy the sanction of the king to rule and would disrupt administration. There was little fear of citizens in revolt taking over the reins of government, and in the Mauryan case it is stated that the objection was to the officials and not to the king.

Peasants are said to have occasionally resorted to migrations to express protest. This would not only disrupt the existing economy because of the desertion of villages and fields but would permit of new settlements if conditions were optimum beyond the boundaries of the kingdom: thus providing an alternative to the existing system. Kings are advised not to oppress their subjects by over-taxing them lest the latter migrate and thereby erode the prosperity of the kingdom.[50] Nor was the migration to new lands a mere gesture. In a period when the population was relatively small and land easily available, the migrations of peasants could well create revenue problems in the smaller kingdoms. It is not surprising that Kauṭilya, jealously guarding the state's control over uncultivated land, prohibits the clearing and settling of forest land without the necessary permission.[51] The Mauryan state also took the precaution of keeping its peasants unarmed.[52]

The threat of peasant migration, consequent to a refusal to pay taxes, occurs in later periods as well. With the establishment of a hierarchy of intermediary landowners, the link between the peasant and the land became more inflexible. In such circumstances, peasant migration, although it did occur,[53] would obviously have been more difficult than in situations where landed intermediaries were absent. Not surprisingly, peasant revolts become an equally effective form of protest, as is evident from at least the sixteenth century. It has been argued that some peasant discontent was spearheaded by the smaller landowners.[54] The migration of the peasantry would have undermined the income of such landowners, while those who espoused the cause of a heavily taxed peasantry would face discontented peasants. Where the revolt was more than just a local refusal to comply with tax demands, the mobilisation often developed religious overtones. The more organised peasant revolts over larger areas identified themselves by caste—such as the Jāt revolts—or by religious sects, such as the Satnāmis. The latter categories carried obvious influences from the widespread *bhakti* movements in northern India such as those of Kabir, Dādu and Nānak, which were to inspire a variety of social action far beyond the vision of the original teachers. The *bhakti* movement was not a pan-Indian movement, but included various sectarian movements with a flexible range of opposition to Vedic exclusiveness and Brahmanical orthodoxy. What gives these movements a pan-Indian character is the broad similarity of their origins, their ideological articulation and the social use to which they were put.

Little is said in the early sources about dissidence or protest among the socially excluded groups, the *dāsa-bhṛtaka* and the *caṇḍālas*. Although some slaves are described as treated ill and others well,[55] there are, in contrast to classical Roman times, no records of large-scale slave revolts. Perhaps the reason was the absence of the employment of slaves on a substantial scale for production. The excluded groups tend to remain excluded in the ideologies of all dissenters, although some are permitted to escape into the parallel society of the monasteries. Even the rationalists, while they do not condemn the excluded groups, do not claim them as part of their audience or encourage opposition to authority among these groups.

Socially excluded groups sometimes express their protest through millenarian movements. Such movements which are common in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions particularly in periods of major change, are barely evident within the indigenous religious traditions of India. Two examples of seemingly millenarian ideas are to be found in the coming of Kalkin as the final *avatāra* of Viṣṇu[56] and the Buddha Maitreya, the saviour Buddha yet to come.[57] The social inspiration for such movements is however very different on the Indian scene. The Kalkin *avatāra* is the hope not so much of the down-trodden but of those who believe that Viṣṇu will come to the aid of the righteous to put down the upstart *śūdras* who have been daring to controvert the law of *varṇa*. Kalkin, therefore, is the hope of those who have lost their privileges and feel thwarted by the trauma of the Kaliyuga. The Buddha Maitreya receives a marginal mention in the early Buddhist texts but develops into the saviour figure of the northern Buddhism of Mahāyāna at a time when there is competition from other religions and when Buddhism itself has split into the two major schools of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. The coming of the saviour is essentially to re-establish the power and the authority of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, rather than to help any oppressed group. Perhaps it is not entirely coincidental that the two movements which do in fact come very close to being Chiliastic movements if not millenarian movements in the strictest sense, those of the Satnāmis and the Munda rising under Birsa, were both movements in the proximity of Islamic or Christian ideas. It could be argued that this was less due to the Islamic and Christian religions *per se* and more to the theoretical social egalitarianism claimed by both these religions, and which, at the level of religious sanction to ideas of social equality, was more explicit in these religions than in other earlier indigenous movements in India.

There has been a tendency to view the role of religion and religious sects in the Indian tradition from a limited perspective. Discussion has centred around philosophical intricacies, the 'eelwriggling' of doctrinal laws and the universe of icons and symbols. Too little attention has been given to the men and women who were the creators, the audience and the continuators of religious cults, sects and organisations. If doctrines and tenets changed it was because human requirements changed, as also the forms of dominant interests.

Religious sects are not static; they change with events. By definition a sect draws upon certain social groups which give it a social sanction and it reflects the changing fortunes of such groups or the incorporation of new groups. Orthodoxy and heterodoxy are never static conditions. Thus Theravāda Buddhism which questioned Brahmanical orthodoxy came to be regarded as the orthodox tradition within Buddhism and against which there arose a number of schismatic sects. Other religious traditions in India showed similar distinctions. To the extent that a religious sect articulates social dissent, it reflects the aspirations of the social strata from which it draws its support. Buddhist sects were anxious to win the support of elite groups after a certain point in the history of Buddhism. The degree of dissent was muted by protest taking the form of ethical opposition, and the parallel society became at times almost parasitical. The dissent was further subdued when in the course of time Buddhist institutions began to appropriate the functions of the elite; a pattern of change which was to be repeated frequently in the strategies of many other religious sects. The building of *maṭhas* and *āśramas*, the acquisition of property and status, the manoeuvring of relationships with political authority, and the appropriation of the role of landowners and commercial *entrepreneurs*, converted the religious sect into a recognisable social group sometimes ending up as a caste. Such sects therefore could not have spearheaded a radical change; they remained at best conciliating alternatives.

It is of considerable interest that in the Indian tradition the effective questioning of or breaking away from caste obligations often required the form of a religious sect. This may be explained as being substantially due to the logic of caste society in which the non-observance of caste norms would otherwise have resulted in ostracism and low status. Given this basic premise anything short of an overthrowing of the structure of caste society made it necessary to legitimise the breaking of rules by seeking the identity of a religious sect and if possible also by building an institutional base to counteract the charge of losing status. The former was by far the easier way out and was resorted to, times without number. The building of an institutional base required the patronage of the wealthy. This weakened the thrust of dissent and diverted it into the formation of a parallel society rather than strengthening confrontation with the existing system. The parallel society not only legitimised the breaking of caste rules but also provided a mechanism for caste orthodoxy to accommodate this dissent, since the parallel system impinged upon but did not disrupt society.

The weakness of the parallel society is self-evident. It does not provide an alternative system for the entire range of social groups but only for segments; it presupposes the continuation of the existing society which permits a small percentage to opt out. The dissenting group remains enclosed and minimal. This is further emphasised by the fact that the parallel society because of the rules of celibacy perpetuates itself by recruiting members from the existing society. In a caste society each dissident group would tend to be confined to its own social milieu. Even those sects which began by cutting across caste ties would, with the weakening of their dissent and in the process of building institutional bases, tend to work within the confines of caste contours. The dissent has to be viewed not merely in terms of attitudes toward those in power but also toward the socially excluded groups. In the competition for status, even among the parallel systems, the socially excluded groups were only marginally involved and were often left to their own resources for mobilising dissent.

Such considerations were not so primary in situations where the dissenters were low caste groups who by dissenting were not lowering their status any further. If together with this the aim of dissent was not to raise social status or demand the equalisation of status, but to protest against oppression, then the protest could be direct. Hence the possibility of peasant protest not requiring the legitimacy of religious form. In cases where a caste identity or a religious identity was used, as for example in the Satnāmi movement, it was more in the nature of extending the movement rather than acquiring legitimacy or, it could be said, to reflect a movement where differing statuses of peasants were involved. Yet even in these protests, whether migrations or revolts, the aim of the movement was to remove the immediate injustice. To argue that such movements were not protest movements because they did not envisage changing the system is perhaps to demand more from them than what they themselves envisaged at the time. The demand for changing the system as an essential quality of protest movements is not only relatively recent but requires certain historical preconditions which did not prevail in earlier times in India.

That religious sects do often become castes would substantiate the idea that certain forms of religious expression were indicative of dissent. In such cases social discontent was more than merely a marginal factor. Celibate monks cannot constitute a caste; although sometimes, in the transition to becoming a caste, celibacy is dropped, at least among those who are involved in the right to succession in property and office. The lay followers, however, can take on a caste status commensurate with the majority ranking of the sect. In such cases the social requirements of building a caste would take primacy over other considerations. Or alternately recruitment to the sect would become restricted to certain castes, and the identity of the sect and those castes would become close where the sect would articulate the ideology of the caste. The effectiveness of dissent lay in bringing about some degree of change in as much as the lay followers were able to either assert their status even if it was low in the *varṇa* hierarchy or on occasion acquire a higher social status. Ivory carvers and corn-dealers, ascribed to *śūdra* status, used Buddhism in their demand for respect from others. But Buddhist lay followers did not aspire to becoming a separate caste and with the decline of the *saṅgha*, they tended to be absorbed without identification, each into his own caste. The Liṅgāyats on the other hand were ultimately successful in asserting a higher status through a judicious use of the religious sect, social dissent and economic potential. In the more remote past the attempt seems to have been to try and bypass the *varṇa* hierarchy. From the late first millennium AD there are more examples of attempts to assert a higher status.

The accommodating of those who opt out is not merely a matter of putting a premium on toleration. To a greater extent it is an indication of a mechanism for containing dissent. Hence the acceptance of *sadhus, fakirs, yogis* and many other 'opters out.' Nor can this be explained in a facile fashion by speaking of the great religiosity of Indian society, for religious expression in itself has to be analysed from a multiple perspective since it performs many functions other than the solely religious.

This interplay of vertical and horizontal structures in Indian society lends it a different complexion and provides it with a logic which has to be understood in relation to its own social context.

Dissent and protest are present in all complex societies and are frequently motivated by attempts at rationalising discontent. The forms which dissent and protest take would naturally vary from one society to another but would be logical within the terms of the structure of each society. Early Indian society was not characterised by absence of striving for material progress accompanied by a decline in ideological evolution. As was the case with many other societies of the ancient world, it neither visualised an ideology directed towards a total change in society nor could it organise such a change. Dissent was resorted to more frequently than protest. The extension of protest to encompass dissent with the aim of restructuring society had to await more recent times.

Notes and References

* Published in *Diogenes* 29 no. 113–14 (1981): 31–54. Copyright © SAGE Publications, 1981. Used with permission.

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47. *Padakusalamānava Jātaka*, no. 432. In the *Gaṇḍatindu Jātaka*, no. 520, the peasants migrate and desert their villages.
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6

Renunciation

*The Making of a Counter-Culture?**

One of the paradoxes of the Indian tradition is that the renouncer is a symbol of authority within society. An explanation of this paradox may emerge from an analysis of the social role of the renouncer. Not many decades ago renunciation was described as a life-negating principle; the fact that it involved an opting out of society led to its characterization as a denial of the need to come to terms with society. But in recent years it has been argued that, far from being life-negating, the techniques adopted by ascetics and renouncers and popularized because of them, have, as axiomatic, the belief that life can be the means of discovering immortality and freedom.[1] An attempt will be made in this paper to argue that the organized groups of renouncers of the post-Vedic period were neither negating the society to which they belonged nor trying to radically alter it: but rather that they were seeking to establish a parallel society. Inherent in this attempt was the notion of dissent; but its articulation was often ambiguous. To the extent that the two societies were kept distinct, there was a tacit recognition of the futility of changing the larger society; that the renouncers had links with this society however, also indicates that there was an equally tacit recognition of osmosis as a process of social change.

Renouncers in any society play a social role. In early India this role is enmeshed with the complexities of caste and with the nature of dissent. The power of the ascetic rubs off onto the renouncer to a far greater degree than, for example, in Christian Europe, and the renouncer becomes a continuing source of both authority and dissent. In the process of osmosis there is also, unlike as in Europe, provision for temporary periods of renunciation (as among Buddhist Orders) which underlines the central role of the renouncer in society, namely, the relationship between the ascetic, the renouncer and the householder.

The term ascetic refers to a person who has opted out of society, renounced social mores and cast himself away. Ostensibly he has also taken upon himself the goal of discovering the ecstasy (*ānanda*) in the comprehension of the ultimate reality and of characterizing this search by resorting to austerity (*tapas*) and meditation (*dhyāna*) with the aim of union with the ultimate reality (*yoga*). A further distinction is however required for the purposes of this paper. A differentiation must be made between the individual renouncer who isolates himself totally and is thus lost to his kin and his society and to other ascetic colleagues—in short, the ideal ascetic, and the one who opts out of society but joins a group of renouncers. The distinction can perhaps be maintained by referring to the former as ascetics and the latter as renouncers. The term renouncer approximates more closely to the meaning of *saṃnyāsin*. The first category has always been something of a rarity, more frequently described in literature than encountered in reality.

The renouncer is identified not necessarily with a religious sect but with an order constituting an alternative life-style, in many ways contradictory to that of his original social group. Thus he cannot observe caste rules, he must be celibate, he cannot own property, he must carry the distinctive outward symbols of his order and he may be required to break various food tabus. The ascetic on the other hand lived in isolation, observed the food tabus by subsisting on what was naturally available in the forest, stressed the fact of his brahmanhood (which he often was in early times) by the austerities which he undertook. A further and fundamental distinction between the two was that whereas the ascetics were figures of loneliness working out their salvation each one for himself, the renouncer was concerned about other people and this concern was expressed in his desire to lead others along the path which he had found. This paper is concerned with the renouncers, who left the society into which they were born and took on the alternative life-style of the sect/order which they joined. At one level the reason for this was that 'the search' required a guide and groups of disciples tended to congregate around individual teachers. At another level there was a conscious attempt to live in a way which would be different from established society.

The focus here is on the social manifestations of these groups and their role in historical change rather than the ideational level and the philosophies which this may have generated. At the ideational level the debate centred on the nature of authority, where the dissenting groups denied the *Vedas* as the source of all knowledge and preferred knowledge acquired through perception and experience.[2] Further, transmigration and notions of liberation/salvation were largely acceptable to both the orthodox and the heterodox but the comprehension of these varied. Other matters of controversy related to the nature of the ultimate reality and the juxtaposition of the individual with the universal. The main concern was with the desire for knowledge which in early society was seen as magical power. Initially asceticism arose from groups which questioned the ritual of sacrifice as the means of acquiring magical power. Proponents of asceticism believed that *tapas* and *dhyāna* were more effective. Gradually the idea was extended to more than magical power—to absolute freedom. Primarily this was seen as the freedom of the soul or consciousness to achieve a state of ecstasy. Logically, it also implied freedom from recognizable worldly bonds, of the human body, the mind and of society. By and large there were certain themes which were common to all these groups and which were preconditions to further knowledge: there was a need to comprehend and control the physical body as also the mind, to differentiate between matter and spirit and to derive knowledge from experience and meditation rather than from the claim to revelation.

The initial part of this paper discusses briefly the major groups of renouncers which gained recognition in the early period, in the context of the historical background and the social changes which may have encouraged the rise of these groups. The second part is concerned with the bi-polarity of the renouncer and the householder as well as the symbols of difference between the two and among the sects. The last section deals with the element of social protest and concern among these renouncers, and attempts to understand the paradox of their social role.

It has been argued that the term 'sect' is a misnomer for Hindu religious groups since the essential element of a sect—the heretical opposition to orthodox doctrine—is absent among Hindu sects.[3] The argument is based on the use of the term *saṁpradāya* as the nomenclature for sect, but this refers to the transmission of a tradition which can hardly be called a heretical process. However, *saṁpradāya* is generally used by the established religious groups with reference to their own sects, i.e. of the 'received doctrine'. The more frequently used terms for other sects are *śākhā*, *mata*, *samāya*, suggesting a branching off or a schismatic group (which implies heresy) or a coming together of those with a common perspective. The selection of sects discussed in this paper is governed by an inclusion of those which identify themselves with reference to a specific doctrine, specific symbols and rituals and the acceptance of a relationship between the lay followers and the sacerdotal hierarchy: all of which would justify the group being called a sect in the wider sense of the word. The case of Buddhist and Jaina sects is unambiguous since the basis is heresy and false doctrine is manifestly clear from the history of the splitting off of the *saṅgha* into sects. In the Greek translation of one of the edicts of Aśoka, the original word *pāsaṇḍa* is translated as DIATRIBE.[4] *Pāsaṇḍa* was used later both of heretics and imposters and the *Purāṇas* describe the Buddhists and the Jainas as such, whilst the latter used the same term to refer to schismatic groups in their own *saṅghas*. It has been further suggested that the ambiguity in the case of the Hindu sects is due to the absence of a centralized institution to control orthodoxy and although caste sanctions often performed this role it was nevertheless not clearly defined. The flexible nature of the Hindu canon also allowed constant and major interpolations which accommodated heresies as well. The assimilative character of Hinduism weakened the idea of false doctrine. Yet the notion of false doctrine was not absent and is apparent for instance in the dissensions of some of the schools of philosophy. In the post-Śaṅkara period it occurs more frequently in the literature. The heresy was often more apparent on the social plane, hence this attempt to view the question from a social perspective.

Asceticism has a historical continuity from the earliest times, although inevitably the role and nature of the ascetic groups has changed over the centuries. It is believed that the earliest representation of an ascetic practice comes from the supposed Paśupati seal of the Harappa culture.[5] A known incipient practice is perhaps that of temporary withdrawals from society during periods demanding a condition of ritual purity. Thus the *yajamāna* of the Vedic sacrifice opts out for the period of the sacrifice. This notion may be extended to a life-time in which ritual purity may result in generating extraordinary powers. Ascetic groups are referred to in Vedic literature, and some texts such as the *Upaniṣads* and the *Āraṇyakas* are largely concerned with asceticism. However a distinction should be drawn between the characteristics emphasised in the *Ṛg Veda* and other Vedic texts. The terms used most frequently in the former are *yati*, *muni* and *ṛṣi*.[6] The etymology of these words indicates magic, mystical rites, meditation and the ecstasy which comes with vision and inspiration. In short, the kind of activity which is more often associated with shamanism. The long-haired *muni*, the *keśin*, flying through the air[7] suggests a shamanising technique as also does the reference to magical heat (*tapas*).[8] The shamans would have to be distinguished from the sorcerers and the sorceresses (*yatu-matī*) said to inhabit the ruins of old cities.[9]

Shamanism is often associated with tribal societies surviving on subsistence economies. The attraction of shamanistic practices however continues even when the structure of tribal life undergoes substantial change. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* Indra is hostile to the *yatis* and on one occasion feeds them to the hyaenas, which possibly led to his being deprived of *soma*.[10] It has been plausibly argued that *soma* was a hallucinogen[11] and this would support the presence of shamanistic activities, incurring the wrath of the tribal deity. Although the shaman was never a renouncer, characteristics of shamanism can nevertheless be seen in the practices of many of the later groups of renouncers. The shaman stood somewhat apart from his tribe, yet was primarily concerned with the well-being (both physical and spiritual) of his tribe. The shaman's norms were a law unto himself, yet at the same time the shaman was dependent on the tribe. His distinctiveness was apparent both from outward symbols of dress and accessories as also by his behaviour. He derived his legitimacy from his claim to superior knowledge acquired through considerable effort involving the claim to magic, meditation and the inducement of visions with the aid of hallucinogens.

In the Later Vedic literature terms such as *tapasvin*, *śramaṇa*, *saṃnyāsin*, *parivrājaka*, *yogi*, occur more commonly. They are suggestive of renunciation, or casting aside one's social obligations, of the taking on of a life of austerity, of controlling the functions of the body (particularly breathing) and above all of wandering from place to place. The *parivrājaka* is sometimes described as a young man who, having finished his education, takes to a life of wandering for a brief period prior to becoming a householder.[12] But more often the *parivrājaka* was a permanent condition. Was this a nostalgia for the nomadic state[13] or was it a flouting of growing authoritarianism which disapproved of wanderers in a society increasingly given to stable agricultural settlements? The mystery surrounding the pre-eminent of wanderers, the *vrātyas*, remains largely unsolved. They appear to have been a group of shamans moving towards ascetic or yogic practices.[14] The *Saṃnyāsa* and *Yoga Upaniṣads* of a later period speak of yogic practices not merely in terms of magical powers (*siddhis*) but also the cultivation of meditation (*dhyāna*) and the control over breathing (*prāṇayāma*), the ultimate aim of which was in part tied up with the search for immortality—a quest which was to take various forms in later centuries and which ran like a thread through the entire texture of ascetic practices. From visionaries and seers, the ascetic perspective moved to peripatetic teaching and the investigating of man and the universe through a variety of intensive techniques of mental concentration and control over the body.

The mid-first millennium BC sees a proliferation of sects in the Ganga plain.[15] Many of these were *parivrājakas* wandering in groups under the direction of a teacher or others loosely affiliated to sects, but preferring to wander by themselves, alone.[16] Their main function, apart from acquiring knowledge, was to participate in discussion and debate. They were such an established institution that some of the towns and larger villages associated them with *kutūhala-śālās*, literally places for exciting curiosity or interest, namely, places for discussion. Many such wanderers lived on the edges of towns and only those of a markedly ascetic disposition retired to places more isolated.[17] Some *brāhmaṇa* ascetics were sedentary, often living in hermitages, sometimes with their families,[18] although claiming to conform to celibacy all the same. These came to be called the Vaikhānasa and later texts mention names such as Saubhari who lived with his fifty wives in a hermitage.[19] *Brāhmaṇa* orthodoxy was averse to city-dwellers and restrictions were placed on *snātakas* visiting cities.[20] The wanderers were often the dissidents. The questioning of the orthodox tradition had started prior to this period, but what was new was the emergence of various sects such as the Nirgranthas, the Ājīvikas and later the Buddhists, not to mention various Cārvāka sects as well. The dissidence of these groups was however qualitatively different since they were not individual dissenters but had organized their dissent into sects whose identity was based on an opposition to the orthodox doctrines as expressed in the notion of the sanctity of the *Vedas*, the authority of the *brāhmaṇas*, *varṇāśramadharma* and the worship of the gods.[21] They were seen as a counter-influence on Āryan polytheism, particularly in their recognition of the rule of natural law in the universe. The theory of transmigration, which was the starting point for a number of these sects, may have been developed from older animist theories.

The proliferation of sects has been explained as due to the break-up of tribal society and its consequences.[22] The cushioning effect of kinship ties was declining with the impersonal relations of post-tribal society coming to the fore. The increasingly hierarchical ordering of society would in any case have been hostile to the wanderers. This was further reiterated by the growth of towns and cities during this period with the anonymity and alienation encouraged by urban institutions. Inevitably there was a search for methods of adjustment. It should also be remembered that the introduction of iron technology coupled with urbanization was more traumatic in terms of social change than any experienced earlier. The age of transcendence was not accidental.[23] At the same time it was precisely the economic margin of prosperity made possible by the new situation which allowed for the maintenance of such large groups of renouncers. Supportive evidence for this comes from the literature itself. The new sects of renouncers lived at the edges of towns, drew their recruits mainly from the towns and were dependent for alms on the householders. The Buddha for example spent more years at Rājagriha and Śrāvastī than anywhere else and the early and important monasteries were located at both these towns and at Kauśāmbi.[24] The earlier Jaina *tīrthaṅkara* Pārśvanātha is also associated with towns.[25] It was the towns which provided the renouncers with an audience and later with patronage.

Important towns were capitals of the *janapadas* and were thus either centres of royal patronage or of oligarchic support, depending on whether the state had a monarchical or a *gaṇa-saṅgha* form of government. The support took the tangible form of offerings and of donations of land for monasteries. Patronage at these social levels was equally effective even when indirect. Thus when Khema, a Madra princess and the queen of Bimbisāra accepted Buddhism, the fame of the Buddha spread to the distant land of the Madras.[26] When the Mallas were ordered by their assembly, the *santhāgāra*, to support the Buddha this greatly enhanced the cause of Buddhism in that *janapada*.[27] Both the Buddhists and the Jainas claim the patronage of the kings of Magadha. Apart from royal patronage there were ministers, bankers and merchants, the *seṭṭhis* and the rich *gahapatis*, who provided *vihāras* for the Buddhist monks.[28] The wealthy *mahāśālā brāhmaṇas* who had received land grants from the king, such as Lohicca and Pokkharasati, were influential persons.[29] In the early years of the Buddhist *saṅgha* the conversions which are singled out for mention were those of the richer *seṭṭhis* and the *brāhmaṇas*. The main body of monks was however drawn from the lower social orders such as artisans, fishermen, hunters, basket-weavers.[30] Similarly, the Mathura inscriptions of the pre-Gupta period indicate support for the Jainas from trading groups, artisans and castes low on the social scale.[31]

The Buddha had greater success among the cities of the monarchical kingdoms. The *kṣatriya* oligarchies were not so forthcoming in their support and some were more partial to the Nirgranthas. The general approval of the Buddhists and Jainas by urban groups was also linked with the ethical views of these sects. Rigorous and extreme ascetic practices although indulged in by some monks were on the whole discouraged. Nor were the earlier shamanistic elements regarded as fundamental. Resorting to the demonstration of *siddhis* was not unknown but in both cases it was permitted only on certain occasions and when persuasive means of conversion through logical argument failed.[32] Some of the symbols of earlier practices such as the sacred tree and the *stūpa* and *caitya* were appropriated into the religious cults. But the emphasis was on knowledge and meditation and the observance of the middle-path (*majjhima paṭipadā*), eminently suitable for urban householders. Furthermore, both the Buddhists and the Jainas had a distinct role for the lay community *vis-à-vis* the monks, and in the case of the former the interaction between the *upāsaka* and the *bhikkhu* was an important aspect of monastic functioning. This was partly a reflection of the doctrine of liberation common to a number of heterodox sects where the concern for the lay community is summed up best in the attitude of the Buddha when he uses the parable of the raft, that those who have discovered enlightenment should not keep it to themselves but should leave the raft for the use of others.[33] The social involvement of groups such as the Ājīvikas, Jainas and Buddhists contributed to the manner in which the *saṅgha* developed in each case. Whatever may have been the primary function of the *saṅgha* as a gathering of persons seeking release from rebirth and which continued to dominate the more sectarian angularities within the institution, it very soon also became the main channel through which the sect communicated with the rest of society.

The history of these sects of renouncers moving into new areas follows a similar pattern. It begins with a handful of monks living singly or in small groups in relative isolation in cave sanctuaries (*leṇas*), as for example the hermitages in the vicinity of Rājagriha or the habitations dotted in the hills of the Tamil country. The isolation was not total since the caves tended to be on major trade routes or in the vicinity of towns. In more arduous terrain these proto-monasteries often provided welcome staging points as did the later monasteries. This is particularly true of hilly country and mountains such as the routes from the plateau to the coast through the Western Ghats or those across Ladakh and Nepal into Tibet. Monastic establishments thrived near urban centres and in rich agricultural regions where there was a surplus to support the monks. It is not altogether accidental that the initial penetration of the heterodox sects into south India coincides with the Roman trade and the trade with south-east Asia. The expansion of the Mahāsaṅghika sect going from Vaiśalī and Pāṭaliputra south to Andhra carefully avoided the tribal belt south of Magadha. Similarly the Sarvāstivāda spread from Mathura northwards to the Punjab and Kashmir but less into the adjoining areas of Rajasthan where there were well-established tribal areas. Apart from the need for a surplus to support the monks, the ethical teaching of these sects was doubtless more appropriate to richer agriculturalists and urbanites rather than to pastoral and hunting people. The worship of tribal deities and the tribal ethic would hardly be conducive to the acceptance of Buddhism.

Gradually commercial patronage and royal support led to the establishment of a full-fledged *saṅgha* with all its physical edifices and accessories. For the mercantile community the Buddhist and Jaina teaching provided the required ethic.[34] Inscriptional evidence witnesses endowments to the *saṅghas* in every region in the first millennium AD. The endowments included land, revenue from villages, shops and residences for the monks.[35] There was a noticeable increase in the number of monks and monasteries. So rich and important were some of these centres that the sects came to be named after the place-names of their residence, thus, the Sandeva *gaccha,* and the Kāñci *gaccha* of the Jainas. Royal patrons were well-disposed to the *saṅgha* since they acted as an instrument of acculturation in the new areas, both introducing the Great Tradition as well as assimilating and focusing on the local culture. But royal patronage was also at the root of the destruction of the social involvement of the *saṅgha* as originally perceived. Lavish endowments of land to the monasteries resulted in a greater secularisation of the *saṅgha*. There was a consequent decline in its concern with providing salvation for the lay community and an increase in its concern for acquiring and maintaining authority.

Individual renouncers and those who joined the 'heretical sects' were in the early stages the chief dissenters. Megasthenes's description of the

Brachmanes and the Sarmanes living in the forest across the Taprobane is indicative of this.[36] Through a process of historical change many of these dissenting groups in time took on the role of the establishment. The Brahmanical theory of the four *āśramas*, first propounded in full in the late *Jābāla Upaniṣad*, brought asceticism into conventional custom by making it the last stage of a man's curriculum and accessible to the upper castes. By implication however the *gṛhastha-āśrama* was a necessary prior requirement. Thus only those who moved directly from *brahmacarya* to *saṃnyāsa* could be called dissenters. An aging *gṛhastha* taking to *saṃnyāsa* was merely conforming to the ideal vita. The heretical *saṅghas* also took on shades of conformism through the acquisition of wealth and power and by association with the ruling elite. At this stage it was necessary for the orthodoxy to consolidate its views on the renouncers and for new groups of renouncers to emerge as the carriers of heresy.

The new groups were to some extent dissidents from among the renouncers. Both the Buddhist and Jaina sects came under the influence of and incorporated Tantric ideas and practices. Vajrayāna Buddhism with an early nucleus at the Vikramaśīla monastery in Bihar was a reflection of this. It also represented the minor but consistent trend among some Buddhist monks of dabbling in magic and necromancy.[37] The still later Sahajiyā cult among the Buddhists was a protest against the formalities of the life and religion of earlier Buddhism. It questioned the earlier theories of knowledge and emphasized the practice of *yoga*. It was opposed not only to scholarship but also to monasticism,[38] thereby underlining what it regarded as the social irrelevance of monasticism. Up to a point, the Sahajiyā cult was revisiting the twilight area of the shaman.

After the mid-first millennium AD when the sects associated with the heterodox religions were on the wane in northern India, there appears to have occurred the spectacular rise of Śaiva monasticism especially in the peninsula. Considering that Śiva is projected as the great ascetic, this is not surprising. Hsüan Tsang refers to various groups associated with 'daiva temples' in the vicinity of towns.[39] These sects and particularly the Kapālikas and Pāśupatas are referred to in earlier literature but are more commonly mentioned in sources from about the seventh century onwards.[40] Clearly there was a gestation period for these monastic orders. From the *Pāśupata Sūtras*, the existence of the Pāśupatas has been dated to at least the second century AD.[41] The *Purāṇas* regard such groups with contempt.[42] They are mentioned in the inscriptions of the Jainas of the

Karnataka with whom there was a sustained relationship of rivalry.[43] The Digambara Jainas were by now concentrated in the Karnataka, well-ensconced in the patronage of traders, merchants and officers of the state.[44] The Kapālikas had their own patrons who endowed them with land and villages. The sect had a strong likeness to many of the activities and practices of the Tantrics and as such came in for scathing attacks from some of the established social groups. Among the more fierce of its opponents was Śaṅkarācārya who accused the Kapālikas of sexual licence and alcoholism. Another influential Śaiva group in the peninsula was that of the Kālāmukhas, sometimes included in the wider category of Pāśupatas. This sect was more sympathetically treated by the orthodox *brāhmaṇas* since it did not question their superiority and, if anything, on occasion subscribed to it. Hsüan Tsang does not refer to distinctively separate monastic organizations associated with these sects although the inscriptions of the subsequent period emphasize this. Possibly this aspect developed later when the survival and effectiveness of dissenting groups once again required the organization of monastic centres, particularly in relation to the competition for patronage and support where some sects with monastic organization were seen to be successful.

By about the ninth century AD there had emerged a distinctive group of Śaiva renouncers, the Daśanāmi Saṃnyāsis. The sect modelled itself on earlier monastic orders with approximately the same broad rules of discipline—permanent residence in monasteries, austerity, celibacy, subsistence on alms and the study and teaching of prescribed texts. The monasteries (*maṭhas*) were attached to temples and these and other properties endowed to the order were administered by the chief of the *maṭha*, the *mahant*.[45] Śaṅkarācārya further organised the Daśanāmi Saṃnyāsis into categories and hierarchies thus simulating the monastic form of earlier sects.[46] The Śaiva *maṭhas* seem to have played the same role as Buddhist and Jaina monasteries, as instruments of acculturation in new areas, since their early distribution was substantially in the peninsula and on the fringes of the heartland in northern India (e.g. Kashmir, Nepal). Saṅkarācārya's imprint is apparent in as much as the sect took upon itself the defence of the orthodoxy, suggesting perhaps that the earlier heterodoxy had become too influential. The Śaivite tradition appears to have been the indigenous tradition in these areas and Śaiva monasticism grew rapidly. The Daśanāmi sect was organized for deliberate proselytizing, its main competitors being the Buddhists and the Jainas with whom the rivalry was to become acrimonious, and at times violent.[47] Apart from the ideological motives, ambition for power and economic control played its part. It has been plausibly suggested that these monasteries in some ways approximated to feudal authority.[48]

Vaiṣṇavism at this stage did not encourage monasticism. It has been argued that Vaiṣṇavism subsumed *yoga* into the *bhakti* tradition when the *Gītā* speaks of *yoga* as the highest way and the true *yogi* as being one who does not detach himself from society but takes on the suffering of others.[49] Since it is in a sense a salvation religion it did not require the agency of renouncers. The process of *bhakti* in itself offers an alternative to both ritual and asceticism.[50] It may also be suggested that proselytization through monastic groups was not required of Vaiṣṇavism since the theory of *avatāras* acts as an agency of incorporation. Nevertheless, by about the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Vairāgin or, as it was popularly called, the Bairāgi movement, initiated Vaiṣṇava monastic orders. From the thirteenth century onwards there were violent conflicts between the Saṃnyāsis and the Bairāgis in the competition for status and power.[51]

It was also at about this time that groups of renouncers calling themselves Yogis and propagating the teaching of Gorakhanātha and the Nāthapanthis spread across northern India. The Yogis reflected the growing influence of Tantricism and in their view it was a combination of Haṭhayoga and Tantric practices which were likely to lead to knowledge and fulfilment. The association of Tantricism with Yoga was probably an undercurrent of one strand in the ethos of renouncers since earliest times. Tantricism has to be viewed not as yet another sectarian movement but as a major religious re-orientation, since the fundamentals of Tantricism pervaded the dominant religious forms at many levels. Not only were there Kapālikas among Śaivas and the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult among Vaisnavas, but even the originally more puritanical religious groups, the Buddhists and Jainas, underwent a Tantric phase. Vajrayāna Buddhism acted almost as the harbinger of the arrival of Tantric cults and ideas into the ranks of both established society and the heterodoxy.[52] The Tantric-Yogic combination was predominant in the relatively less Hinduized border regions—the northwest of the subcontinent and Assam, and this may explain it as being a channel by which elements were assimilated into Hinduism coming into importance as it did in the period of such incursions.[53] It may also be said to reflect the rise of the substratum culture coinciding with the social elevation of relatively obscure families and castes in the new areas brought into the political and economic vortex of courtly cultures via the system of land grants.[54] The *siddhācāryas* of this cult are more frequently of low caste.[55] The substratum culture was opposed to the orthodox tradition, an opposition which came to be symbolically expressed in Tantric ritual, much of which is a reversal of *brāhmaṇa* values.[56]

This all too brief survey indicates that the appearance of renouncers as an organized section of society occurs historically at periods of change when there emerge within society not only religious but socio-economic sanctions to maintain such groups, as for example the growth of urban centres and the expansion of the agrarian economy. The religious impetus may come from the need to institutionalize a way of life that is new (the Ājīvika, Jaina and Buddhist *saṅghas*) or as a strategy for proselytizing (the Daśanāmi Saṃnyāsis and the Bairāgis) or as a means of crystallizing a popular religious ethos and providing it with status (the Tantric sects and the Yogis). Not all such sects were opposed to orthodoxy, but the technique of using social heresy was employed to organize a religious identity, and the sects therefore registered various degrees and stages of non-conformity. The Buddhist, Jaina and Ājīvika monks were opposed to Brahmanical orthodoxy but the expression of their dissidence took on a puritanical form, in which certain social mores were ultimately strengthened but the manifestations of Brahmanical religion were discarded. The groups influenced by Tantricism accepted some of the religious symbols but discarded many of the social mores. The Daśanāmi Saṃnyāsis supported Brahmanical orthodoxy but did not conform to the Brahmanical view of *saṃnyāsa* in the setting up of monastic centres.

The historical pattern therefore carries within it a range of divergencies. The ideals of Brahmanical *saṃnyāsa* are opposed by the renouncers of various persuasions, such as the Ājīvikas, Jainas and Buddhists, who organize themselves into monastic units and who are characterized by an ethic of moderation in action. The notion of monastic organization is then taken up by other groups when it becomes socially necessary for purposes of recognition and support. Some such as the Daśanāmi orders are created to counteract the growth of other religious sects and to propagate orthodoxy. Others such as the Pāśupatas and Kapālika sects retain an extreme stance abhorrent to orthodoxy. It has been suggested that the Pāśupatas were shamans *manqués* with their vows of beast-imitation and sexual practices,[57] a suggestion which has interesting possibilities *vis-à-vis* the tradition of later Tantric cults as well. The Vaiṣṇava monastic orders eventually take on the role of competing with the Daśanāmis. The influence of Tantric beliefs and practices extends to all the religious groups and initially it acts as a dissenting line of thought and action. Eventually, groups such as the Sahajiyās produce their own opposition to the Tantrics.

Cutting across the chronological scheme is the lineal descent of certain trends. The *brāhmaṇa saṃnyāsin* remains largely unchanged, playing a role of social conformism but with a potential of protest should he have wished to use it. The renouncer, associated with an ethic of moderation remains primarily within the order of the Buddhists and the Jainas, which however develop their own orthodoxy and become increasingly less linked with dissent. The more shamanistic groups tend to be those opposed to all forms of orthodoxy and consequently carry an immediate potential of protest. Furthermore, the institution of the monastery acts as a curtailment on dissent. There seem to be two phases in the evolution of such groups: the pre-monastic, where the element of protest is stronger, and the monastic, when concessions have been made to conformity.

To the extent that historical change led to the emergence of these sects, the sect itself underwent transformation reflecting historical change. The holding of Councils, characteristic of Buddhism and Jainism, indicates new regional and social demands and schismatic tendencies pointing to a groping towards adjustment in an effort to stabilize. Most of the issues under debate at these Councils related to the rules of behaviour and the organization of the monastery—food and the acceptance of money offerings for example. Where the nuances of interpreting the doctrine were at issue the problem could often be traced back to a social cause. The rules of almost every sect underwent change with the gradual accretion of rituals, the introduction of new forms of worship, the deification of the founders and, above all, the encroachment of the lay and monastic communities on each other. It is these 'inner contradictions', as it were, of orthodoxy and heresy and schism which develop within each sect and which preclude the historian from describing them as either orthodox or heretical in every situation and for all time.

For our purposes, the most important aspect of the social role of the renouncer is the relationship between the renouncer and the lay community. The initial relationship is perhaps best seen in the bi-polarity between the *brāhmaṇa* and the *saṃnyāsin*.[58] Hinduism, it has been said, is a dialogue between these two, where the *brāhmaṇa* represents the religion of the group, assimilative and well-established, whereas the *saṃnyāsin* represents the liberation of the individual, exclusive and separated from society. This bipolarity is apparent in much of the symbolism which distinguishes the renouncer from conventional society. The Brahmanical ideal of the ascetic was based on a denial of any form of reciprocity between the *saṃnyāsin* and society, thus negating a major focus in Hindu social action, namely reciprocity.[59] But the ideal was rarely observed and more often than not the relationship between the *saṃnyāsin* and *gṛhastha* came to the fore. This was certainly historically the richer and more complex relationship where the bipolarity of the two takes on a dialectical interconnection. The outward symbols by which the renouncer was recognized were often anathema to Brahmanical orthodoxy, but the root of the contradiction of *saṃnyāsa* as a social phenomenon lay in the negation of the social function of *gṛhastha* by the *saṃnyāsin*. The two are polar opposites and yet dependent on each other. The lay community provides material support for the renouncer through *dāna* (gifts and offerings) and alms, and in turn the merit, *puṇya*, accumulated by the renouncer is in part transferred to the lay community. In each case the relationship is initially sharply differentiated and the difference is expressed in the adoption of totally opposite symbols. Gradually the differentiation becomes blurred and, although the symbols may continue, the relationship begins to overlap.

The bi-polarity is made very evident by the totally contradictory rules of discipline as applied to the householder and the renouncer. There is first of all an initiation ceremony at the time of entering *saṃnyāsa*[60] which indicates the renouncing of one's social obligations and ties and opting out of the society into which one was born. Where the entry is according to the ultimate *āśrama*, the *saṁskāra* becomes a life-cycle rite. The concession to *saṃnyāsa* as the ultimate *āśrama* was perhaps to prevent renunciation among young men. To that degree it would also have acted as a check on active dissenters. That *saṃnyāsa* in one's old age, when one's obligations to society had been fulfilled, was gaining the best of both worlds. This is reflected in some texts in the debate on the legitimacy of such *saṃnyāsa*, since in old age celibacy and the giving up of property is not too difficult. The true *saṃnyāsin* should avoid the state of *gṛhastha*. The ceremony of the Hindu *saṃnyāsin*, at whatever age he entered *saṃnyāsa*, symbolized his death to society and the acceptance of a life ultimately attached to loneliness and complete self-reliance. He was required therefore to quench the sacrificial fires and perform his own *śrāddha* ceremony. For the *saṃnyāsin* entering an order this was ameliorated as it was in the case of a *bhikkhu* where one life-style, that of the householder, was substituted by that of the community of monks, where the refuge of society was replaced by the refuge of the order and the monastery. The trauma of the change softened by the creation of a new tie, that between the novice and the *ācārya* or *guru*, since in all cases the renouncer had to begin his renunciation under the tutelage of a teacher. The Buddha emphasized that this relationship should be as one between a father and son.

The *gṛhastha* enters his *āśrama* with the reverse values, where he is being introduced to his social obligations and attachment to a family. The procreation of his own family becomes essential to this condition, whereas the renouncer has to remain celibate. Celibacy was a necessary condition to all sects of renouncers although in some of the more extreme Tantric acts ritualized sex was required.[61] The householder concerns himself with the acquisition of material possessions and property for the welfare of the family whereas the renouncer forswears any claims to property or possessions other than a few symbols of his new status.[62] The insistence on the renouncer being a wanderer (a rule which was observed until the sect became prosperous and powerful) was mainly to prevent the development of any attachment, either with the lay community or with fellow monks and *saṃnyāsis*.[63] It also encouraged the notion of individual salvation. The concept of *ahiṃsā* in daily routine was easier in the observance for the renouncer,[64] a case in point being the precautions taken by Jaina monks to clear the ground from living beings before stepping on it and wearing cloth masks to prevent the breathing in of insects. The renouncer was forbidden any kind of profession or occupation and, more particularly, manual labour. This again sharpened the difference between him and the householder. The former was expected to spend his time in study, meditation and the purification of the mind and the body by the practice of *prāṇāyāma* and *yoga*,[65] all of which were, from the material point of view, counterproductive.

Further distinctions were made in the breaking of food tabus. The monks and the *saṃnyāsin* were forbidden from doing their own cooking and could receive only cooked food as alms.[66] This was a contradiction of the *brāhmaṇa* otherwise being permitted to accept only uncooked food from non-*brāhmaṇas* and cooked food only from those of the appropriate caste. The *brāhmaṇa saṃnyāsin*, in one text, is told to avoid food from *śūdra* houses[67] but there was no prohibition on this. Some *brāhmaṇa* ascetic groups however did observe the normal restrictions by living in isolation in forests and surviving on fruit and roots, thus eschewing altogether the acceptance of alms. But this was possible only to those who lived alone or in small groups, such as the ascetics mentioned by Megasthenes.[68] It is interesting that historical references to such groups become more limited in later periods when monastic orders develop. The Jainas had elaborate rules regarding the acceptability of food even within the limitations of living off alms.[69] Further, the fact that food was eaten together in an assembly (irrespective of whether it was collected through alms or cooked for the monastery as in later times), also undermined the rules of caste commensality. Dietary rules differed among the sects. Generally, animal food and alcohol were forbidden. Some groups deliberately contravened this and the Kānphaṭā Jogis ate meat, drank alcohol and indulged in narcotics. The Aghoris made a fetish of this principle by allowing flesh from human corpses. The eating of meat and fish and the drinking of alcohol were ritualistically prescribed in some of the Tantric sects.

Visual appearance underlined the separation between the householder and the renouncer and was symbolic of the new life-style of the latter. The renouncer was either naked or else wore clothing of a distinctive colour—red, ochre or white—or of a distinctive kind, as for example, unstitched robes. The head was either tonsured or else the hair was unkempt (*jaṭā*). The latter signified a condition of power through danger in as much as hair signified virility and aggression.[70] The Buddhists and the Jainas on the other hand made a ritual out of depilation, perhaps initially to demarcate themselves from *brāhmaṇa jaṭila saṃnyāsins*. Most *saṃnyāsins* carried an alms bowl and a staff and some identified their sect with a *tilak*. The *daṇḍa* or staff was so characteristic that the early ascetics were called *maskarin*, i.e. those of the bamboo staff, *maskara*. The later word *daṇḍa* might also have been associated with the extension of the meaning of *daṇḍa*, authority. Living in a monastery again demarcated the habitational area of the renouncer from that of the lay community. The final and most symbolic of the oppositions was that the ascetic among Hindu sects was to be buried in a sitting posture and his *samādhī* came to be regarded as a sacred enclosure, an object of veneration. The householder was cremated in a common cremation ground which has always been a place of great impurity, fit only to be maintained by the *caṇḍālas*. In some cases, the adoption of certain symbols was not merely the breaking of social tabus but also the deliberate cultivation of the horrendous—association with dirt, excreta and corpses—in order to highlight the disassociation with 'normal' society. The courting of dishonour was on occasion deliberately designed to shock the public and attract attention. In the case of the Pāśupatas the justification for this has its own interest.[71] By simulating an anti-social action the Pāśupata was believed to acquire the merit of the observer who unnecessarily reviles him and the bad *karma* of the Pāśupata is transferred to the observer.

The adoption of outward symbols has its own contrapuntal pattern. The *brāhmaṇa* ascetics who kept matted locks, ate uncooked food such as fruit and roots in the forest or accepted alms and ate in the evening, lived beneath trees and emaciated their bodies were directly contradicting the mores of the Buddhist and Jaina *bhikkhus* who demanded depilation, ate only cooked food in the forenoon, and lived in *vihāras*, many among them keeping away from extreme physical austerities. It is only in the acceptance of religious suicide as the ideal manner of dying, and which was abhorrent to the orthodox, that there was agreement, although the particular form in which the suicide was to be achieved differed.

Inherent in the need for this differentiation is not merely the opting out of the existing life-style and substituting it with a distinctively different one but also that the characteristics of the new life-style be seen as a protest against the existing one. To this extent such movements may be regarded as movements of dissent.[72] But the element of protest was muted by the wish, not to change society radically, but to stand aside and create an alternative system. Ideally, liberation lay in joining a sect of renouncers. Some sects such as the Ājīvikas made this conditional. Others conceded that this was not open to everyone and a via media was suggested, as for example the *upāsaka* or periodic renunciation as among the Buddhists. Ultimately, when the renouncers were themselves viewed as having fallen short of the ideal, they were denounced. This could result in the emergence of schismatic groups. Initially, it was dissent which led to a splitting off from society or an established sect and the renouncers formed elements of a counter-culture. Eventually, many became dependent on society. The splitting off was often led by those who, disgruntled with the order/sect, took a lone path in their search for salvation. Nevertheless the sects of renouncers did create a climate of opinion in which the legitimacy of dissidence was conceded. It is a moot point as to whether such sects can be called protest movements *per se* or whether they are manifestations of a sustained counter-culture which, from time to time, reacts to social pressures and throws up movements which carry, among other things, traces of social protest. The ultimate in dissidence was still the *parivrājaka* who did not join any order and wandered alone, or for that matter even the isolated *saṃnyāsin.*

One aspect of the dissidence was that, in theory at least, most sects of renouncers disregarded caste observances. There was a debate on whether the two symbols of brahmanhood, the top-knot (*śikhā*) and the sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*), should be retained by *brāhmaṇa saṃnyāsins*;[73] as also the controversy on whether *śūdras* should be recruited as a separate sect, as in some of the later *saṃnyāsin akhārās.*[74] In the main, the *Dharmasūtras*, the Epics and the *Purāṇas* are averse to the idea of *śūdra* ascetics[75] indicating that renunciation was open only to *dvijas*. Among the Ājīvikas, Buddhists and Jainas, the sect was open to any caste. The physical proximity of all castes in a congregation was also a contradiction of certain caste restrictions. Among some Tantric sects there were no caste identities since all males were considered as forming one caste and all females another.[76] The Sahajiyā cult was unambiguous in its attack on the status of the *brāhmaṇa* and caste society in general.[77] Nor was it only a protest against caste. The preaching of universal values with universal application and the notion of transcendence in the theories of knowledge of such sects was itself a denial of the dominant social values and was implicitly a questioning of the religious beliefs and groups whose identity focused on caste affiliations.

However, religious universalism was also sometimes used for what appears to be a form of social manipulation. The Kālāmukha Saṃnyāsins, for example, claimed *brāhmaṇa* status and took the name ending of *paṇḍita-deva*, and were often the defenders of *varṇāśramadharma.*[78] One may wonder whether the sect was not used by some *non-brāhmaṇas* to acquire individual *brāhmaṇa* status, since one of the signs of Brahmanhood—Vedic and Sanskrit learning—was available to and encouraged among the members of the sect. In this connection it is interesting that the priests of the Yogi caste in Bengal associated with the Nātha cult have been referred to as *rudraja brāhmaṇas*, deriving their origin from Rudra and eventually claiming to belong to a 'Śiva' *gotra.*[79] This would be a case of using the alternative system to acquire status.

The break with society and the anonymity of the new entrant were sought to be established by the taking of a new name. The latter indicated the new identity in terms of the monastery (thus Mahānāma points to a connection with the Mahāvihāra), or the sect (Digvijayanātha indicates a Nāthapanthi), or the desire for the attainment of *mokṣa* (as in the use of *ānanda* as part of the name) or to the degree of attainment (as reflected in titles such as *avadhūta* or *paramahansa*). Each of the *maṭhas* established by Śaṅkarācārya was said to have been associated with a *gotra*[80] (as for example, the *kāśyapagotra* with the Govardhana *maṭha* at Puri) and the members of the *maṭha* would take on its *gotra*, thus subscribing to a form of Sanskritisation.

The negation of the family as a basic unit of society is evident from the opposition to the *gṛhastha* status and especially the insistence on celibacy. This can also be seen as perhaps an avoidance rather than an infringement of the fundamental rule of caste organization, namely, the prohibition on inter-caste marriage. Women, whether as nuns in the Buddhist and Jaina orders or as *parivrājikās*, were on the whole grudgingly accepted. Nuns were always under the jurisdiction of the monks and in both orders were regarded as an inferior category.[81] This was in spite of the fact that occasionally women of the royal families became nuns, although the majority were from less exalted social groups.

The effectiveness of an alternative life-style could not remain an arbitrary process beyond a certain historical point. The *parivrājakas* and *śramaṇas* of the *Upaniṣads* had, for a variety of reasons, to identify themselves as groups rather than move about as individual wanderers. The authoritarian trends in the states emerging in the mid-first millennium BC were not always sympathetic to wanderers.[82] They were often seen as people escaping social responsibility or socio-political demands. Their survival as free thinkers was dependent on their being able to assert the right to an alternative life from a position of institutional security. Only then could they obtain the political rights of passage so essential to their existence. Furthermore, their continuity in an egalitarian parallel system could only be safeguarded if their leaders could confront political authority as powerful heads of sects. The social ineffectiveness of the actions of individuals was demonstrated by the effectiveness of the group. Among the early efforts at assembling groups around specific doctrines were, as we have seen, the sects of the Cārvākas and Ājīvikas.[83] But in order to be effective a name was not enough, a physical habitation was also necessary. This contributed to the evolution of the monastery.

The monastic institution grew out of a need for a permanent residence during the rainy season when mendicancy was difficult. Such seasonal residences (*āvāra*) gradually acquired a longer duration in the *ārāma*, often a park endowed by an individual to the *saṅgha*, such as the Ambavana of

Jīvaka at Rājagriha. Ultimately, the settlement of monks expanded into a *vihāra*, a regular monastic complex. In the organization of such a monastery the features of the parallel society are apparent. There is an attempt at imitating the structure of the tribal and oligarchic systems. The hierarchy of units in the Jaina *saṅgha* uses a terminology which is reminiscent of the lineage structure of the earlier tribes—*gaṇa*, *kula*, *śākhā*, *anvaya* and *gaccha*. In the Buddhist *saṅgha*, the general assembly of monks was the sovereign authority and even the *saṅghathera* had to abide by its decision.[84] The emphasis on frequent assemblies and unanimous decisions is stressed in the early literature. Every ordained monk was a member of the *saṅgha* and all monks living within the jurisdiction of a particular monastery had to be present at the *uposatha* assembly. Ownership of property vested with the *saṅgha* and never with the individual monk. (In later centuries, however, the shares of the monks in the monastic property led to some of them acquiring a substantial personal wealth.)[85] Grievances against individual monks were discussed at the assembly as also any breach of monastic regulations or the rules of the sect.[86] The ritual of initiation into the *saṅgha* was similar to that of adoption into the tribe, adoption being the only means of entry into both.[87] Underlying the structure of the monastery was the emphasis on conjoint action and discipline and the strict enforcement of monastic regulations. The monastery was not the place for those seeking absolute freedom, for whom asceticism in isolation was preferable. The monastery provided an alternative only to those who opted out of social obligations.

The functioning of the *saṅgha* has been described as an attempt to retrieve the fast vanishing past.[88] It may be argued that the form adopted was also in deliberate opposition to the monarchical system and its centralized power, which system is otherwise seen as ideal for society and to which the lay community is required to give its loyalty.[89] This again serves to underline the distinction between the lay community and the monastic group, where the latter takes on the nuances of a primitive commune, perhaps echoing the Utopian egalitarianism of pristine society.[90] Or did the *saṅghas* in newly monarchical societies act as 'safety valves' for the containment of political dissidence, taking on the role of egalitarian sanctuaries?

The relative absence of hierarchy in the monastic structure was however not a permanent feature. The goods and services of monastic living required that some monks be designated the distributors of food (*bhata-uddesaka*), accommodation and furniture (*senāsanagāhāpaka*), robes (*cīvarapatiggāhaka*)[91] etc.; with donations and endowments, administrative infrastructures became necessary. The revenue from endowed lands had to be collected, the interest from donations to be recorded.[92] Annual dues had to be shared out among the monks who were resident in wealthy monasteries and the profits from endowed lands distributed after meeting the annual expenses. Repairs to old buildings and the construction of new buildings had to be supervised by those monks appointed as *ārāmapesakas*.[93] Administrative responsibilities not only cut into the normal functions of a monk but also required an administrative hierarchy within the monastery. This increased its participation in the local economic life. The monastic calendar increasingly coincided with the agricultural calendar.[94] Ultimately, the monastery was legitimized as a socio-economic institution through the myths explaining its origin, through the establishment of the Vinaya Laws which became the legal code of monastic groups and through the acquiring of an historical identity.[95]

The establishment of the Śaiva monasteries was not a dissimilar process. Śaṅkarācārya is said to have organized *saṃnyāsi* groups on a functional basis by the arrangement of ten orders among the *saṃnyāsins*[96] and by setting up four major monastic nucleii, the four *maṭhas* at Dvārkā, Badrī, Purī and Sṛngerī, with clearly demarcated territorial jurisdiction. Distinctions of sectarian loyalty within the Daśanāmi Saṃnyāsis were evident from the accessories which they carried such as the design of the staff, the type of *rudrākṣamālā* and the *tilak*. Contact within the monastic network throughout the country was maintained by *saṃnyāsins* of the same sect going on regular pilgrimages and visiting other *maṭhas* in different parts of the country. The regular assemblies of Śaiva ascetics at the time of festivals in the major pilgrim centres was another means of intermonastic communication and administration. The proliferation of land grants in the early medieval period accelerated the prosperity of many *maṭhas* as did the donations to the temples attached to these *maṭhas*, converting them into semi-administrative units with a tangible economic viability in agriculture and trade. This prosperity was enhanced by the fact that *saṃnyāsins* and their institutions were free from any taxes,[97] which was a boon in the period after the eighth century AD, when taxes tended to multiply.

Even more far removed from the ascetic ideal was the organization of the *akhārās*, or military wings of the *maṭhas*. The earliest of these, believed to go back to the ninth or tenth century AD, were of the Daśanāmi Nāgas.

They were maintained by wealthy *maṭhas* almost as a regiment of mercenary soldiers. Some sources maintain that the *akhārās* were manned by *śūdra* recruits.[98] The emphasis was on physical prowess and skilful weaponry, which were used to full effect in later periods in the battles with the Bairāgis.[99] The para-military basis of the *akhārās* is clear from the fact that they were arranged in a hierarchy of importance, the protocol of which was strictly observed at festivals and *melās* when they assembled. Each *akhārā* had its own banner and insignia of identification. The financial maintenance of the *akhārā* came from the lands and buildings owned by the *maṭha*, the offerings and donations made at the temple, a variety of religious levies and participation by the *maṭha* in local banking and commercial activities.

In the eyes of the lay community, the acquisition of an historical identity was crucial to the transformation of the sect and the monastery into a social institution and to the bestowal of a legitimacy reaching into the past. The historical tradition was put together in various ways. A list of succession of the Elders of the monastery was preserved where each dissident monastic sect would mark its break by maintaining a variant list. Thus the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda lists vary as can be seen in their respective literatures.[100] Similarly there is mention of the succession in the Kālāmukha *maṭha* attached to the Kedāreśvara temple at Balligavi.[101] The lists of succession of the nine Nāthas vary from region to region.[102] Founders of sects and important personalities associated with their growth became the subjects of sections of the *Ācārāṅgasūtra* and *Kalpasūtra* on Mahāvīra, or of Ānandagirī's *Śaṅkaravijaya*. Sometimes the history of an event was sought to be established by associating a known personality, preferably a king, with the event: thus Ajātaśatru features in Buddhist and Jaina literature and Aśoka in Buddhist literature.[103] Even more effective was the attempt to compile the history of a particular monastery and relate it to the state, such as the Mahāvihāra monastery in the *Māhāvaṃsa*. The history of the sect itself could result in a substantial inclusion of the history of the region such as the *Dīpavaṃsa* in Śri Laṇka or Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*. At a more local level, the histories of regions or areas, such as the *Śrimāla Mahātmya* of the Jainas, were collections of information, factual and fanciful, on places of sectarian importance, associating the place with the sect. Such records claiming to be historically valid were also necessary to prove the legitimacy of the institution in disputes over property and juridical rights. With the development of missionary activities, these historical antecedents could be used in the balance of power with secular institutions.

The evolution of the monastic institution (irrespective of the religious sect to which it belonged) into a form where it participated to a substantial degree in secular life was in a sense self-annihilating. This participation, especially in economic life, tended to erode the notion of a counter-culture and strengthen that of a parallel society. In the early stages, the reach of the *vihāra* or the *maṭha* into secular economic life was limited and was related at a simple level to redistribution and reciprocity. Redistribution was enforced by the lay community having to maintain the renouncer on alms and by the making of donations and endowments. For the ordinary householder, the feeding of monks was sufficient. For the rich householder, there was the providing of oil and clothing, the repairing and building of monasteries and, for even wealthier patrons, the endowment of land. Reciprocation lay in the tying of *dāna* to *puṇya,* where, in exchange for alms and donations, the householder acquired merit. But when the *dāna* was of a nature that enabled the monastery to lead its own independent existence, the distance from the lay community increased, the reciprocation of *puṇya* became reduced and the character and the role of the monastery underwent a change. This in turn undermined notions of social protest.[104] This was further intensified in situations where the monastery played a major role in the urban or rural economy.[105]

The reciprocal relationship between the lay community and the *saṅgha/maṭha* was pivotal to the making of a parallel society and can be seen at various levels. Royal patronage was the source of reciprocity at the political level. Patronage was of two varieties: there was the direct endowment of caves, monasteries, residences, the revenue from villages and lands to the sects;[106] and there was the indirect support derived from royal investment in commerce and manufacturing guilds, the interest from which was donated to monastic needs.[107] Thus the nexus of royal patronage and the sect was woven into the rural and urban economy. The monasteries in such situations provided a variety of services. Each sectarian group maintained a network of links and control over a large geographical area and thereby helped to build a political base as well. If the sect was politically loyal to the king the monasteries which they controlled would act as focal points in the diffusion of this loyalty, thus providing a further support for the administration. The interplay between the sect and political authority is reflected in those situations where rules of discipline relating to the former may be modified to placate the latter. This it would seem was the main reason for the Buddha prohibiting the recruitment to the monastery of officers in royal service (*rājabhaṭas*), slaves and offenders against the law.[108] The monasteries had access to a large local base in the lay community and could be mobilised to provide a focus for public opinion and possibly even provide political legitimacy to the king. One of the channels for exercising public opinion was through the educational function performed by the *saṅgha* and the *maṭha*. The orientation of the religious institution would inevitably become at least a part of the subconscious of the lay community. This was further strengthened with the emergence of these institutions as the centres of artistic and intellectual life in the community.

For the more powerful and richly endowed monasteries, a political role became a necessity.[109] The relative independence of the monastic institution was a threat to political authority. At the individual level, monks and *gurus* were influential and many functioned as advisers through the office of the *rājagurus* to kings and administrators.[110] Not all the incumbents of this office were *brāhmaṇas*. Some of the Kālāmukha monks were preceptors to kings. Theoretically, Jaina monks were supposed to preserve political neutrality by refraining from friendship with kings, royal officers and administrators.[111] However, in the Gaṅga and Hoysaḷa kingdoms they were active participants in political policies and king-making, and in Rajasthan and Gujarat were closely associated with royalty. They had the advantages both of a high degree of literacy and of close links with the banking and financial groups, both of which the royal family could not ignore. With the patronage of royalty and wealthy citizens providing such an expansive area of social intrusion, it is not surprising that the competition for this patronage among the sects sometimes took a violent turn.

A less quantifiable reciprocity between the monasteries and the lay community related to the former providing an ethic and discipline for the latter. This emerged from and complemented the activities of a particular social group which supported the sect. The Buddhist attitude to the laity illustrates the point most clearly. A distinction was made between the general run of lay followers and those who were especially devoted to and closely associated with the *saṅgha*, namely the *upāsakas*. This rippling out of the degrees of support strengthened the position of the *saṅgha*, *vis-à-vis* the lay community. The majority of the *upāsakas* were *gahapatis* and in the *gahapativagga* sections of some of the *Nikāyas*, their problems in accepting the teaching and discipline of the *sangha* are discussed. Central to these was the inability of the *gahapati* to detach himself from worldly possessions particularly the accumulation of gold, property, servants, etc.[112] The category of *upāsaka* seems to have been created to circumvent this problem so that the *gahapati* could be associated with the *saṅgha* as more than just a lay follower without renouncing his attachment to all possessions. Thus the duties of the *upāsakas* were not only to maintain the *saṅgha* but also to look after the welfare of their own families. The moral precepts required of the *upāsaka* focused on the puritan ethic of austerity, saving and investment, as much as on being generous in making donations to the *saṅgha*[113]—the two not being entirely unrelated. Some of the abstinences prescribed for *uposatha* days were required of the *upāsaka* but none of these were especially arduous and the promise of wealth and prosperity (among other things such as attaining heaven) was the reward. The directions given to women lay followers in particular, underline the requirements of a well-to-do housewife attending to the well-being of her husband and his material comfort.[114]

Overt concern with the lay community is not so clearly ascertainable from the literature and practices of sects other than the Buddhists and the Jainas. But, by and large, the providing of an ethic remains an essential part of the relationship. The Daśanāmi sects provide a base for orthodoxy to the same extent as the Tantric sects reversed the ideals of this orthodoxy. The social groups from which they sought their support were of course not the same and, upto a point, the sects were embodying the ethical systems which these social groups found most conducive. The advantage to the lay community, quite apart from the acquisition of merit and other non-material rewards, was that their ethical systems were validated and imbued with moral authority when they were seen to emanate from a body of renouncers.

The moral authority of the renouncers was derived from two sources. One was the non-tangible psychological relationship with the lay community based on the charisma of the renouncer. The other lay in the apparent contradiction of a social nexus based on the repudiation of society which we have been attempting to discuss in this paper.

The charisma of the renouncer has been a continuing feature of Indian society. The great men of the tradition include those who are seen as successful ascetics. There is no limit to their power for even the gods fear them.[115] The authority of the ascetic is not only of parallel stature but often exceeds that of kings, for the ascetic is associated with powers beyond the ordinary, symbolised as magical powers. It is this which attracts the respect and awe of the lay community. Here the achievements of the individual isolated ascetic imbued with mystical powers rub off onto the renouncer in the monastery and add to the prestige of the latter. The charisma is seen at the simplest level in the fact that the renouncer is able to detach himself from material possessions. Furthermore, he is celibate and yet, at the same time, the most virile of men.[116] The ascetic's demonstration of sexual prowess is not a contradiction in terms: it is in fact a demonstration of his complete control over body functions, since ideally the emission of semen is prohibited to him.[117] Sexual practices were associated with this and with magic and both of these became a prerequisite for claims to mystical powers. They were insisted upon even in the ritualized sexual practises of Tantric sects, which practices were essential to detachment from the normal rules of morality.[118] The mystical element was enhanced by the association of fecundity and sanctity with sexual union performed on ritual occasions. This had antecedents in the *aśvamedha* and *mahāvrata* ceremonies.[119]

Celibacy or, alternatively, ritualised sexual practices were not however the main component of the charisma. It lay as much in the magical powers derived from the comprehension of bodily functions and from knowledge ensuing out of prolonged meditation. The search for knowledge often led to non-conformist directions. This involved experimenting with the human body at a physical level, either by using external aids such as hallucinogens or by manipulating the functions of the organs of the body such as breathing, pulse and heart-beat and either extending or atrophying the muscles. Experimenting with states of mind took the form of exercises in meditation. Some of these practices went back to the shamanistic practices of at least the Vedic period if not earlier. Others evolved with the coming of new knowledge, both genuine and spurious, which tended to gravitate in non-conformist circles.

Theories of knowledge was yet another area in which the renouncers sometimes functioned as dissenters. These ranged from the development of logic and analytical concepts to secret cults antagonistic to orthodoxy. The early groups, as we have seen, objected to Vedic orthodoxy and the tradition of received knowledge. They sought experiential knowledge or tried to understand it as a function of the intellect. Yogic powers achieved through *tapas* were seen as a manifestation of control over the human body extending into the mind. Levitation, flight and invisibility were possible through yogic power.[120] The generally non-conformist trend among such sects was in part a search for a non-orthodox comprehension of knowledge and in part a means of asserting power through claiming to know the incomprehensible. Emanating from this was, on the one hand, the development of philosophical schools and, on the other, the exercise of what was generally regarded as non-conformist knowledge. Among the latter, medicine attracted attention as also did alchemy (*dhātuvidyā*, *rasāyanavidyā*). In neither case was the knowledge tabu in orthodox circles but the investigation was hedged round with social restrictions. The ascetic tradition emphasized experimentation and demonstration which was antithetical to the scholastic tradition.

The interest in medicine can be related to yogic exercises where the aim is to control breathing (*prāṇāyāma*), to understand the structure and inter-connection of various parts of the body, to prolong life by these processes and by the use of certain vegetable and mineral matter, and, in the understanding of the mind, the use of hypnosis, hallucination and meditation. Nāgārjuna in a sense sums it up when he refers to the transformation of *prakṛti* (substance) by the use of *oṣadhi* and *samādhī*.[121] Patañjali in the Kaivalyapada of the *Yogasūtra* states that *siddhi* can be attained by the application of a herb, and the commentators explain this as a reference to *rasāyana*.[122] It is not surprising that the earliest of the major compendia on medicine, that of Suśruta is associated with Nāgārjuna.[123] Nor is it strange that Taxila, apart from being a culturally cosmopolitan town with important Buddhist monasteries, was equally renowned as a centre of medical knowledge. That some form of approximate medicine was practised by ascetic sects is mentioned specifically by Megasthenes in his description of the *sarmanes*.[124] In the Buddhist and Jaina tradition, attending to the medical well-being of the lay community is incumbent upon the monk.[125]

The interest in alchemy developed in the early centuries AD, presumably when both mercury and sulphur were available and their properties familiar.[126] Nāgārjuna, the Buddhist philosopher, is described as being conversant with alchemy.[127] A Chinese source refers to an Indian taken to China by Wang Hsuan Tse in the seventh century AD who claimed that he knew the substance for prolonging life.[128] The early medieval period saw a considerable interest in alchemy among certain Jaina groups and later among Yogi sects associated with Tantricism.[129] The fascination lay in two processes fundamental to alchemy—sublimation and transmutation.[130]

Through sublimation the structure of the metal was decoded and could be changed. Transmutation was the actual changing of one metal into another, the most common attempt being to change bronze or copper into gold. Both these processes had an analogy with yoga—the changing of bodily structures to enable the body to be transmuted into one capable of performing feats beyond the normal and gaining new perceptions. The connection with Tantric practice can be subtle but apparent, as for example in the statement that Hara and Gauri (mercury and mica) must combine in order to produce a new substance[131]—a clearly sexual symbolism for the transformation of substances. The close connection of alchemy with medical knowledge was through the use of various metals in medication.

Much of this knowledge remained secret, passed on orally from the *guru* to the novice. Eventually the secrecy became a cult and developed its own language, as for example the *sandhā-bhāṣa*,[132] which helped not only to perpetuate the cult and permit free communication among its practitioners, but also protected the *yogi* from the non-initiate and separated him from the profane universe.[133] Some Tantric sects do generally stand out as being different and it has been plausibly argued that their materialism contributed to concepts of the physical sciences. The *dehavāda* tradition led to their taking an interest in human anatomy and these sects argued that the brain was the seat of consciousness and not the heart.[134] In their alchemical ideas, emphasis was placed on experiment and observation, as is evident from the eighth century text, the *Rasaratnākara*. (Whether the enhanced interest in the conversion of base metal into gold was motivated entirely by the wish to control the magical alchemical process or whether it was due to a shortfall in the availability of gold still requires to be investigated. The interest seems to coincide with the decline of supplies of gold from Central Asia and the hoarding of golden objects in temples. However, other sources of supply such as West Asia were also becoming available.)

Experimentation in the use of hallucinogens was primarily to achieve heightened perception and these are described in detail in the *Yogasūtra*, the *Abhidharmakoṣa* and certain Buddhist texts. This was also part of the tradition of non-conformist knowledge since hallucinogens change perception even if they do not transmute bodily substances. That these experiments were only for the initiates was clearly stated. The ritual of the use of hallucinogens had moved from the *soma* rites of the Vedic sacrifices, where it was part of the mainstream of orthodox ritual, to the twilight areas of secret, heretical practices, indicating thereby the change which the orthodoxy itself had undergone, particularly in its attitude towards experimentation and perception.

The charisma of the renouncer therefore derived from the practice and pursuit of non-orthodox knowledge, which provided one aspect of the ultimate moral authority of the renouncer. Equally important was the fact of their creating an alternate or parallel society. The renouncers demonstrated their power by maintaining a recognized style of life without resort to any profession. The prohibition on manual labour highlighted their ability to live off society: yet they were not *of* society. The renouncers were above and beyond the conventional laws, for they conformed to their own laws and these were often in contradiction to the accepted social laws. This gave them added prestige as it also gave them the freedom to protest against the laws of normal society. The form which their protest took was the flouting of social convention. The accommodation of this protest, and the investing of it with charisma and moral authority, has been in a sense characteristic of Indian society. But it has also been subject to the fact that, ultimately, the society of the renouncers had to be supported by the lay community. The opposition inherent in the status of *gṛhastha* and *saṃnyāsa* remains, but the relationship is essentially dialectical, for the one cannot exist without the other. Changes within the lay community affected the community of renouncers and the lay community was, in turn, influenced by them. The acceptance of the renouncer as a necessary counter-weight to conventional society may account for the continuing authority of the renouncer.

Notes and References

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1. M. Eliade, *Yoga*, Princeton, 1971.
2. K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London, 1963; A.L. Basham, *The History and Doctrine of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1951.
3. A. Eschmann, 'Religion, Reaction and Change: The Role of Sects in Hinduism', from, *Religion and Development in Asian Societies*, Kandy, 1974. The Greek root HAIRESIS indicates the choice of a doctrine, again by implication referring to a range to choose from. The Latin root *secta* refers to

a body of followers, the heretical element being a contribution from Christian ecclesiastical history.

4. D. Schlumberger and E. Benveniste, 'A New Greek Inscription of Aśoka at Kandahar', *Ep. Ind.*, XXXVII, part v, no. 35. pp. 193–200.
5. J. Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilisation*, London, 1931, pp. 52ff.
6. *Ṛg Veda*, VII.22.9; 56.3; 70.4; VIII.3.9, 6.18; X.14.15; 72.7; 109; 136; 130.5.
7. *Ṛg Veda*, X. 136.
8. M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, Princeton, 1974.
9. T. Burrow, '*Arma* and *Armaka*', *Journal of Indian History*, XLI.1963.I. pp. 159ff.
10. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, VII.28.
11. G. Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, New York, 1968.
12. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, IV.4.22.
13. F. Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*, Berkeley, 1975, p. 204.
14. J.W. Hauer, *Der Vratya*, Stuttgart, 1927; M. Eliade, *Yoga*, Princeton, 1971, pp. 103–5.
15. Buddhist sources mention fifty-eight major sects whereas Jaina sources take the number up to three hundred and sixty-three. *Dīgha Nikāya*, Brahmajālasutta, I.12.30; *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* (S.B.E., XIV, pp. 315–19).
16. *Dīgha Nikāya*, Udumbarika-Sihanādasutta, III; N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, Calcutta, 1973, I. pp. 31ff.
17. Strabo, XV.1.60; Curtius, VIII.12.
18. Strabo, XV.1.59.
19. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.3.1ff.
20. *Manu*, IV.107; *Gautama DS*, XVI.45; *Baudhāyana DS*, II.46.33.
21. N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, I. pp. 104ff; S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, Poona, 1956, pp. 60ff.
22. A.L. Basham, *The History and Doctrine of the Ājīvikas*, pp. 4ff.
23. R. Thapar, 'Ethics, Religion and Social Protest in the First Millennium BC in Northern India', *Daedalus*, Spring, 1975, vol. 104, no. 2, pp. 119–33. *See* chapter 3 in this volume.
24. N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, pp. 147ff and 167ff.
25. S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, pp. 60ff.
26. N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, I, p. 197.
27. N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, p. 183.
28. Such as Anāthapiṇḍaka and Viśākhā (the daughter of a *seṭṭhi* of Sāketa). *Mahāvastu*, I.4; *Cullavagga*, VI.4.10; VIII.7.4.
29. *Dīgha Nikāya*, I. Lohiccasutta; Ambatthasutta.
30. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, New Delhi, 1968, pp. 468ff.
31. S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, pp. 101ff.
32. S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, pp. 420ff; *Ep. Carnatica*, VII.64, 66, 117, 127, 140, 351; *Dīgha Nikāya*, Samannaphalasutta.

33. *Majjhima Nikāya*, I.134–5. The idea was developed further in the notion of the Bodhisattva as the saviour and the compassionate one who defers his own *nirvāṇa* to help others attain it, and also in the concept of the Buddha Maitreya as a chiliastic principle.
34. D.D. Kosambi, *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956; R. Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 28ff.
35. S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism.*, p. 105.
36. Strabo, XV.1.59.
37. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, London, 1954, p. 280.
38. S. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Calcutta, 1946, pp. 35ff.
39. T. Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, New Delhi, 1973, reprint, I. p. 221.
40. D. Lorenzen, *The Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas*, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 13ff; V.S. Pathak, *History of Śaiva Cults in Northern India from Inscriptions*, Varanasi, 1960.
41. *A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 11, pp. 393ff.
42. *Vāyu*, I.VI11.64–5; *Brahmāṇḍa*, II.31.64–6.
43. D. Lorenzen, *The Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas*, pp. 24ff.
44. S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, pp. 114ff and pp. 568ff.
45. R.N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, Varanasi, 1975, pp. 96ff.
46. G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, Bombay, 1964, pp. 70ff; H. Chakraborty, *Asceticism in Ancient India in Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jaina and Ajivika Societies*, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 178ff.
47. The later rivalry of the Jainas and the Lingāyatas in Karnataka took in its sweep idol breaking and temple destruction as well. The Buddhist disapproval of Śaṅkarācārya was expressed in a number of Buddhist works. One among these refers to his losing a debate with Buddhist monks and, as a result, being ducked thrice in the Ganga, Taranatha's *History of Buddhism in India*, Calcutta, 1972.
48. R.N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, pp. 65ff.
49. M. Eliade, *Yoga*, p. 153.
50. F. Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*, p. 171.
51. G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, p. 177.
52. S. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, pp. 14ff.
53. M. Eliade, *Yoga*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 200ff.
54. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 263ff; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India*, pp. 375ff, Allahabad, 1973; R.S. Sharma, 'Material Roots of Tantricism', International Orientalists Conference, Canberra, 1971.
55. N.N. Bhattacharya, *Ancient Indian Rituals*, Calcutta, 1975, p. 139.

56. L. Dumont, 'World Renunciation in Indian Religions', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1960, IV. pp. 33–62.
57. D.H. Ingalls, 'Cynics and Pāśupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor', *Harvard Theological Review*, LV, 1962. pp. 281–98.
58. L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, London, 1972.
59. J.C. Heesterman, 'Vratya and Sacrifice', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 1962, VI, pp. 1–37.
60. *Vinaya Piṭaka Pātimokkha*; *Ahguttara Nikāya*, IV.202; *Baudhāyana DS.*, II.10.11–30; *Manu*, VI.38; *Yājñavalkya*, III.56; *Viṣṇu DS.*, 96.1.
61. D. Lorenzen, *The Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas*, p. 97; G. Briggs, *Gorakhanātha and the Kānphāṭā Jogis*, Calcutta, 1930.
62. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II.4.1; III.5.1.
63. *Manu*, VI.41–4; *Vasiṣṭha Dh. S.*, X.12–15.
64. *Manu*, VI.40, 92–4; *Yājñavalkya*, III.61–6; *Gautama*, III.23.
65. *Manu*, VI.70–5.
66. *Manu*, IV.207ff; V.129; VI.43; *Āpastambha DS.*, I.5.16.21–2.
67. *Vasiṣṭha DS.*, X.31.
68. Strabo, XV.i.59.
69. *Ācārańgasūtra*, II.1.1–10.
70. J.P.S. Uberoi, 'On Being Unshorn', in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, Transactions of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, no. IV, 1967.
71. D.H. Ingalls, 'Cynics and Pāśupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor'.
72. It is perhaps worth keeping in mind that the word 'dissent' has only relatively recently been secularised in English. Dissent is embedded in the ecclesiastical history of European Christianity and refers to groups in opposition to the doctrine of (particularly) the Church of England. Until the eighteenth century it referred to Christian nonconformists. It is only when political sectarianism became significant in the nineteenth century that it took on the secular connotation of differences of opinion on politics and society and the articulation of seemingly radical action for change. Etymologically the word is based on the negative prefix and is the reverse of consent. 'Protest' derives from an act of protestation or a formal declaration in legal terms. Its etymological root relates it to being a witness in a court of law or parliament. Again, it is not until the eighteenth century that it comes to be accepted as a formal expression of dissent or disapproval in matters other than the law (O.E.D.).
73. *Jābālopaniṣad*, 5; *Śańkara on Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, III.5.1.
74. *Śańkara* on *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, IV.5.15.
75. *Rāmāyaṇa*, Uttarakāṇḍa, 67.1–6; Kālidāsa, *Raghuvaṁśa*, XV.53; *Visnu Purāṇa*, VI. 1.37.
76. Anandagiri, *Śańkaravijaya*, XVII, quoted in D. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, pp. 274ff.

77. S. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, pp. 35ff.
78. D. Lorenzen, *The Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas*, p. 149.
79. S. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, p. 198.
80. H. Chakraborty, *Asceticism in Ancient India in Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jaina and Ajivika Societies*, pp. 171–2.
81. S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, pp. 465ff: A curious feature in Jaina literature is that in listing the number of followers of various *tīrthāṅkaras*, the figures for the number of nuns and women lay-followers is always substantially larger than for the men, *Kalpasūtra*, SBE, XXII, pp. 267–8.
82. A.K. Warder, 'Early Buddhism and Other Contemporary Systems', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1956, XVIII. 1, pp. 43ff.
83. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, argues that perhaps Ājīvikas were the earliest to evolve a *saṅgha*.
84. *Dīgha Nikāya*, XVI, Mahāparinibbanasutta.
85. Cf. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, 'Some Economic Aspects of Monastic Life in the Later Anuradhapura Period: Two New Inscriptions from Madirigiriya', *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, January-June 1972, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 60ff.
86. N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, pp. 290ff and 313ff.
87. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, p. 483.
88. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*.
89. *Dīgha Nikāya*, III, Cakkavatisihanādasutta.
90. *Māhāvaṁsa*, II.1ff.
91. *Vinaya*, II.160–75.
92. Fa Hsien in S. Beal, *Chinese Accounts of India*, Calcutta, 1958, I, p. 22; I. Tsing in J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, Delhi, 1966, p. 193.
93. *Vinaya*, II.160–75.
94. R.N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, p. 59; S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-eastern Thailand*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 81ff.
95. S. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London, 1962, p. 76.
96. G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, pp. 82ff; H. Chakraborty, *Asceticism in Ancient India in Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jaina and Ajivika Societies*, pp. 178ff.
97. *Viṣṇu DS.*, V.132; *Āpastambha DS.*, II.10.26, 14–17.
98. G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, pp. 103ff. In this connection it might be mentioned in passing that there is a curious institution of the *caṭṭas* and *bhaṭṭas* referred to in various sources but whose exact function is not very clear. They occur in the post-Gupta period, are associated with *maṭhas*, were trained in Sanskrit and Vedic studies and in the handling of weapons and arms. They are generally accorded *brāhmaṇa* status but are nevertheless differentiated from the other *brāhmaṇas*. M.G.S. Narayanan, 'Kantalur

Salai—New Light on the Nature of Āryan Expansion into South India', *PIHC*, Jabalpur, 1970, pp. 125–36. The epigraphs recording land grants prohibit the entry into the area by these persons in the phrase, '*a-cāṭa-baṭṭa-praveśya*'. They have been described as a para-military vanguard of *brāhmaṇa* settlements or else as a category of semi-officials. Might they have been the precursors of the later *akhārās*, who were not to be encouraged in *agrahāras* and other land granted by the king, since, living off alms as they were (and possibly enforcing the *dāna*) they would be a financial liability?

99. G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, pp. 98, 177; G. Briggs, *Gorakhanātha and the Kānphāṭā Jogis*, p. 35.
100. As, for example, the variation as recorded in the *Māhāvaṁsa* and the *Aśokāvadāna*.
101. B.L. Rice, *Ep. Carnatica*, VII. J.F. Fleet, 'Inscription at Ablur', *Ep. Ind.*, V.1890–99, pp. 213–65.
102. S. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, pp. 208–9.
103. Hemcandra, *Triśaṣṭiśalākapuruṣacarita*, pp. 160–4; *Divyāvadāna*; *Aśokāvadāna*.
104. The installation of a *mahant* described by J.C. Oman in *The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India*, London, 1903, pp. 253ff, takes on the character of a gigantic potlatch in which the redistribution is limited to the *saṃnyāsis* alone. Such an occurrence indicates a departure from the notion of reciprocity or at any rate the return flow is obscured.
105. R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, 'Irrigation and Hydraulic Society in Early Mediaeval Ceylon', *Past and Present*, November 1971, no. 53.
106. Such as the Baniyan Cave in the Barabar Hills given to the Ājīvikas by Aśoka Maurya and those in the Nāgārjuna Hills given by Daśaratha. Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, London, 1997 (2nd. ed.), pp. 186, 260; Donations of this nature to the Jainas are listed in S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, pp. 101–35; similarly for Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas in D. Lorenzen, *The Kapalikas and the Kalamukhas*, pp. 24–8 and 111–14. The monastery at Nālandā was financed through an endowment of the revenue of two hundred villages according to I. Tsing and J. Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, p. 65.
107. R.N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, pp. 88ff and 96ff.
108. *Mahāvagga*, I.61.1 to I.72.1.
109. This is perhaps best described with reference to the Mahāvihāra monastery in the *Mahāvaṁśa*, particularly in the period subsequent to Devānampiya Tissa.
110. R.N. Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, pp. 88, 90.
111. S.B. Deo, *The History of Jaina Monachism*, p. 239.
112. N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, II, pp. 210ff.
113. *Dīgha Nikāya*, III, Sigalovādasutta.
114. N. Dutt, *Early Monastic Buddhism*, II, pp. 217ff.

115. As is evident from the general contempt with which Indra is treated by the great ascetics in the *Mahābhārata*.
116. As for example, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana in the *Mahābhārata*.
117. W.D. O'Flaherty in *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, Oxford, 1973, tends to treat it as a contradiction.
118. F. Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*, p. 104.
119. M. Eliade, *Yoga*, p. 254.
120. M. Eliade, *Yoga*.
121. Quoted in M. Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, New York, 1971, pp. 127ff.
122. S. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, p. 193.
123. There is a controversy as to whether this is the same Nāgārjuna as the Mādhyamika philosopher. J. Filliozat in *The Classical Doctrine of Indian Medicine*, Delhi, 1964, pp. 11ff, argues for this identification. It is significant that Hsüan Tsang (T. Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, II. pp. 200–6) refers to the philosopher as being an expert in medicine and alchemy.
124. Strabo, XV.1.59.
125. *Mahāvagga*, I.39.1. Even a monastery as late in date as Nālandā is described as a centre for the study of medicine, astronomy and mathematics (S. Beal, *The Life of Hsüan Tsang ...*, pp. 112, 153).
126. For a discussion of the pre-Arab date for the use of mercury in India see P.C. Ray, *A History of Hindu Chemistry*, Calcutta, 1907–25, II, pp. 8ff.
127. T. Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, II, pp. 200–6.
128. J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Cambridge, 1954, I, p. 212.
129. The twelfth century text, *Rasārṇava*, is associated with Tantric groups. Merutuṅga wrote a commentary on the alchemical text *Rasādhyāya*, in the fourteenth century.
130. *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*, 1972, qv. ALCHEMY.
131. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, p. 329.
132. The word is probably a mis-reading for *sandhya-bhāṣā*, but it has gained currency as *sandhā-bhāṣā*. qv. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, although most scholars would accept its meaning as 'intentional language'.
133. M. Eliade, *Yoga*, pp. 251ff.
134. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata*, pp. 335ff.

7

*The Householder and the Renouncer in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Traditions**

In the discussion on the four *āśramas* as theoretical preconditions to the concept of *puruṣārtha* there has been a tendency to treat the *āśramas* as chronos-free, floating as it were in historical space. The theory has been analysed and its structure viewed essentially from the perspective of belief systems and rituals in a broadly Brahmanical context. It might, however, prove rewarding to consider that the theory has a historical specificity and to view it as an ideology which is pertinent to and is interlinked with a historical situation; that the theory was elaborately formulated long after the idea of *āśramas* was first articulated and in its practice also, historical changes are very noticeable; and that these changes were evident particularly in the institutions which accompanied the theory.

Such an analysis requires that the *āśrama* theory be seen not as an isolate but as one segment in a larger ideological whole. A consideration of its relation to other facets of the perspective on man and his life as viewed by a variety of belief systems would not be out of place. The range of the latter is obviously vast; and two among them have been selected in terms of a methodological exercise for consideration, the Brahmanical and the Buddhist both having been major movements at the time. To see the theory only in Brahmanical terms is to leave out the context within which it developed. To separate the two traditions in viewing the ideological concerns of the mid-first millennium BC is to pull a historiographical situation out of alignment. Historically in the initial stages, the

Brahmanical and Buddhist world-views presented both a dialectical and an inter-face relationship. Within this the notion of *āśrama* and its implications read as distinct ideological formulations relating to problems perceived in common by both. Sociological writing on India has drawn heavily on the Indological tradition which in turn has concerned itself substantially with the Brahmanical world-view overlooking the fact that from the mid-first millennium BC to the mid-first millennium AD, the period when theories such as those of the *āśramas* and *puruṣārtha* were expressed and crystallised as ideals, was a period when Buddhism was, if not the dominant belief system in northern India, certainly as important as Brahmanism. The separation of the two stems in part from the decline of Buddhism in India from the second millennium AD and the tendency, therefore, to underestimate its significance for earlier times. An overly synchronic view of Indian society tends to obliterate the strands which go into the weaving of the present from the past.

The two stages of householder and renouncer have been viewed in recent writings as binary opposites (Dumont 1960). It has been argued that whereas *gṛhastha* was oriented to reciprocity viewing life as a series of interactions with others, renunciation denied reciprocity and to this extent it denied a major focus in Hindu social action. Indian society, it is said, constrains the individual and renunciation alone allows the individual to be independent and liberated from the fetters of life. It is said that the renouncer was not concerned with changing the social order but being outside it. In a holistic society individualism has to be a condition of opposition to such a society (Dumont 1980). It is, however, debatable whether the seeming dichotomy between householder and renouncer is as much of a binary opposition as has been made out; or whether the main thrust of the *āśrama* theory was to reduce the absolute dichotomy by introducing an interplay of the dialectic of the householder and the renouncer in each of the *āśramas* but with one being given greater prominence over the other. In other words, the binary opposition was not posed in the formulation of the theory of the *āśramas* but in the content of each of the four. Nor is the dichotomy absolute. The joining of an order by the renouncer often brought him back into performing a social role. This not only reduced the claim to individualism but also involved him in trying to change the social order. It is not accidental that socio-political reformers in India have frequently appropriated the symbols of the renouncer (Thapar 1979).

The debate on renunciation, which is in many ways the focal point in both traditions, has centred on the question of whether the ideal of *saṃnyāsa* and that of the *bhikkhu* evolved independently at a particular historical conjuncture or whether the one was influenced by the other (Jacobi 1895; Varma 1922; Dutt 1924; Bhargava 1968). The counter-posing of the *gṛhastha, gahapati*/householder to the *saṃnyāsin, bhikkhu/renouncer*, is worked out in the form of the four *āśramas* in the Brahmanical tradition. Buddhist views pose the opposition more sharply and in essence it is reduced to two. The counter-position relates to the dialectic of attachment and non-attachment to a worldly life. In the four *āśramas, brahmacarya* is a stage in preparation towards the passage to the other three and swings from *gṛhastha* to *saṃnyāsa* in the symbolism of its rituals. Whereas the guru simulates the renouncer, the guru's house harks back to the setting of the householder. *Gṛhastha* is obviously the stage of the householder, but he has to aid the renouncer with alms and hospitality and is constantly aware of his obligations to the renouncer as indeed the renouncer when he intervenes in social action, as many do on occasion by demonstrating their powers, is reiterating the interplay. The location of hermitages in the vicinity of settlements points to a degree of participation in social life which cannot be taken as the renouncer making a total break from society. *Vānaprastha* is more directly a preparation for *saṃnyāsa*. It could be argued that the choice of four stages was a spelling out of the two, but that this was not entirely arbitrary. It may have been inspired by the need to conform to the four of the *varṇas* particularly useful in the model of the *varṇāśramadharma*; or perhaps that there was symbolic convenience in the number four; or that in the stretching out to four it offered choices of a kind more in keeping with the Brahmanical tradition.

Not only does the Buddhist tradition pose more sharply the dialectic of attachment and non-attachment but encourages a choice between the two, thus laying the emphasis on an implicit opposition. However, even in the Buddhist tradition the interplay is discernible. The *gahapati* has to maintain the *bhikkhu*, a relationship which is echoed in the later *dharmaśāstras*. Even the *bhikkhu* in the monastery had eventually to choose between a greater involvement with the village or a retirement into seclusion. The *āśrama* theory seeks to ameliorate this problem of choice by converting it into a life-cycle within a life-time, thus eliminating the need to choose at an early stage and also permitting the problem of choice to resolve itself into a given curriculum, or else occurring late in life when the extremity of the choice is less severe. The central point of the *āśramas* is not, however, the individual life-cycle so much as the concern with social obligations. The Brahmanical tradition further underlines the priority of social obligations by making *saṃnyāsa* the final stage, subsequent to the performance of social obligations. However this does not preclude the taking up of *saṃnyāsa* at an early stage in life since this is the terminal *āśrama*.

The earliest exposition of the *āśrama* ideal as a theory is found in the *dharmasūtras* which although they cannot be precisely dated were certainly texts of the post-Vedic period and composed in a period probably contemporary with, and in some cases subsequent to, Buddhist teaching (Banerji 1962; Lingat 1973). There is no uniformity in the *dharmasūtras* with regard to terms used for the four stages, although a broad conceptual agreement regarding three or four stages in a life-cycle is expressed. Thus Baudhāyana refers to the last two as *vānaprastha* and *parivrājaka* (II.11.14). Gautama refers to *brahmacāri*, *gṛhastha*, *bhikṣu* and *vaikhānasa* (III.2). Āpastamba seems to suggest that after the period of *brahmacarya* it is possible to proceed to any of the following stages, *gṛhastha*, *acāryakula mauna*, *vānaprastya* (II.21.1). The early *dharmasūtras* maintain that there is really only one *āśrama*, that of *gṛhastha*. The others are inferior to it as they do not permit the begetting of offspring (Kane 1941: 422). The usage of describing the four *āśramas* as *brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha* and *saṃnyāsa* took a little time in becoming standardised. Pāṇini, generally dated to the fourth century BC, refers indirectly to the different *āśramas* but not to the theory as an entity (Agrawala 1963: 83).

The notion of renunciation was however prevalent earlier than the period of the composition of the *dharmasūtras*. It has been argued that renunciation may have been common among those not identified with Vedic society and the *yatis*, *munis* and *śramaṇas* are quoted as among the earliest renouncers (Pande 1957: 251–61). The association of renunciation with those who meditated on death and the link between repeated birth and death, conditioned by attachment to desire, is a theme familiar to the *Upaniṣads* (e.g. *Bṛhadāranyaka* IV.3.2.2–10) although the link through the soul being reincarnated was not developed until a later period. Renunciation was seen as an important, if not a necessary precondition to an escape from death and rebirth. In the search for *mokṣa*, the efficacy of *yajñas* was doubted, with knowledge, meditation and renunciation being seen as more viable methods. Reference is made to the three *skandhas* which may have been an early groping towards the theory of *āśramas* since they are described as *tapas*, *brahmacarya* and absolute control over the body. Of the renouncers, the *śramaṇas* are frequently mentioned, and often they held views contrary to those of the *brāhmaṇas*. That there was intense hostility between the *brāhmaṇas* and the *śramaṇas* is reflected in the metaphor of describing them as having a natural antipathy such as between the snake and mongoose.[1] The hostility was in part due to the ideological negation of Brahmanical practices by the *śramaṇas* and their opting out of social obligations. The division is also referred to in Buddhist sources where the *brāhmanas* are described as being of two kinds, those who perform rites and those who meditate and are renouncers (*Dīghanikāya* III.94). The *śramaṇas* as renouncers were also opposed to the *brāhmaṇas* as performers of the *yajña* and recipients of *dāna*. The *brāhmaṇas* were to develop the notion that in return for *dāna* they took upon themselves the sins of their *yajamānas,* thus entangling themselves further in social obligations. This was anathema to the renouncer, who even when he joined a sectarian order and thereby took upon himself at least minimal social obligations, was never as seeped as the *brāhmaṇa* in such obligations.

A suggestion of another kind, attempting to explain renunciation, has been offered in the argument that some cultures obliterate certain kinds of emotions as, for example, those of intense loneliness, by denying them public expression. It is said that the Indian environment encourages a flight from emotional involvement[2] and withdrawal from entanglements with the world. Asceticism is valued as a condition which denies the expression of passion in any form. Renunciation is born from the need to escape pain (Moussaieff Masson 1980). Such an explanation raises questions of a culture's articulation and would be viable in a few cases of renunciation where this specific reason is given by the individual renouncer. But it would not hold true either for *saṃnyāsa* as the final *āśrama* or for the compulsions which led *śramaṇas* to organise themselves into sectarian orders or indeed which led to the rank and file joining such orders.

Degrees of social obligations were also written into the four *āśramas* by the linking of this theory with that of *varṇa* and the labelling of both as *dharma*. The implication of the latter would suggest that they were regarded partially as incumbent on those *dvijas* who were concerned both with observing social obligations and attempting to attain to *mokṣa*. Alternatively insofar as the *varṇa-dharma* was the theory of the ordering of society, the *āśrama-dharma* was also to be taken not literally, but as a theory towards the ordering of the individual life-cycle. However *āśramas* and *varṇas* do not form a vertical and horizontal grid for the entire range of society since the *āśrama* curriculum is only open to the *dvija* and consequently applies to and is the concern of a relatively smaller segment of the social whole.

Even within the *dvija* its actual applicability is limited almost to the *brāhmaṇa* caste. The *kṣatriyas* are also included within this curriculum but, in fact, the *kṣatriya* had his own *puruṣārtha* as we know from other sources. The ideal life-style of the *kṣatriya* falls back upon earlier heroic models of the warrior and the protector, in short the *vīra* or hero. Even when the connotation of *kṣatriya* changed from warrior to landowner and gift-giving (*dāna*) became as important as protecting, heroism remained an aspect of this ideal *kṣatriya* function. It drew on the pre-*āśrama* period of a lineage based society in which the mores of the clan chiefs and their families were the norm and these certainly bypassed the *āśrama* theory and continued to be maintained in the widely dispersed and well-attested cult of the hero, as is evident from the numerous hero stones (*vīragal, pāliya, kīrti-stambha*) found liberally scattered in various parts of the subcontinent from the first millennium AD. The 'good' death for the hero was that he should die defending himself, his kinsmen and their property. Such a death ensured eternal life in heaven, accompanied by his wife should she have become a *satī* on his death. In some cases the hero was deified by his kinsmen and community. So consistent is this pattern that it can legitimately be spoken of as an actual *kṣatriya āśrama* and it is curious that it was ignored in the *āśrama* model if the purpose of the model was to include varying life-styles. This may have been due in part to the model excluding the clan-based society subscribing to heroic values, since the social milieu of the *āśrama* was that of peasant and urban society.[3]

The appeal of renunciation as envisaged in the *āśrama* theory would have been limited to the upper castes. If the texts relating to those who opted out and became renouncers, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Āraṇyakas*, provide any clues then clearly this option was open to *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas* in the main. The renouncers were not the sorcerers and the magic men of the earlier pastoral society but were those who had deliberately chosen to dissociate themselves from the beliefs, rituals and social obligations of a complex society with the aim of discovering an alternate path to salvation because of disillusionment with the existing ways.

In analysing the reasons for the growth of renunciation at this time, it has been suggested that it was partially the result of the disorientation which followed on the break-up of clan based society with the emergence of urban centres and the authority of state systems (Warder 1956). Nostalgia for the clan may have led to the particular organisation of Buddhist and Jaina monasteries, where many of the ecclesiastical terms—*saṅgha*, *kula*, *gaṇa*—originate in the *gaṇa-saṅgha* chiefships of the middle Ganga valley. Alternatively, the *gaṇa-saṅgha* system provided a model for organising such sects, especially as the founders and other important members of the *saṅgha* were from the Śākya, Jñātrika, Vajji and other such *gaṇa-saṅgha* clans. Parallels are frequently drawn between the structure of the monasteries and that of the *gana-saṅgha* system (*Aṅguttaranikāya* IV. 17; *Dīghanikāya* II.72ff). The monasteries were seen ideally as egalitarian sanctuaries in an otherwise increasingly hierarchical society dominated by the monarchical state.

Urbanisation in the Ganga plain in the mid-first millennium BC encouraged the growth of scepticism and sophistry among the wandering renouncers who roamed through the towns teaching their doctrines. This was, however, a later phase of an enquiry which had begun earlier in the variant ways suggested in the quest for *mokṣa*. Within these suggestions can be traced an element of dissent which was crucial to the comprehension of the role of renouncers in society.

The theme of dissent originates in the questioning of revealed knowledge with a preference for perceived knowledge and in the exploration of other methods of comprehending the universe (Jayatillake 1963). The ritual of sacrifice was found to be inadequate and was substituted by *tapas* and *dhyāna*. The change from *yajña* to *tapas* and *dhyāna* was in itself a shift from participation in a public ritual, meticulously prescribed, to a more personalised quest for an open though arduous method of individual and private articulation. But the very isolation of the renouncer from public performance imbued him with a charisma which was to be most effective in its public role. The liberty given to the renouncer to question the *Vedas* was the thin end of the wedge leading to a much wider range of questioning. The expression of dissent and protest was one element in renunciation but the joining of an order or sect could and did modify the social content of the protest (Thapar 1979). Those who joined sects and returned to preach in villages and towns had a social counterpart to their search for release from rebirth as is evident from the Buddhist view of the relationship between the householder and the renouncer. The questioning of revealed knowledge and the dependence on *yajña* for salvation coincided with the gradual erosion of the prestation economy central to the *yajña* ritual. Whereas the protagonists of the *Upaniṣads* merely opted out of the system, those who were members of what have been called the 'heterodox' sects, further threatened the slowly receding faith in the *yajña* ritual among the householders: a faith which was partially restored by the use of the Vedic sacrifice as a ritual of legitimation in the monarchical states. The householder as the performer, preserver and guardian of the sacrificial ritual became the counterpoint to the renouncer who denied both the ritual and the social role of the one who preserved it.

The questioning of knowledge is an enterprise in which few take part. The direction of the quest was more restrictive, focus as it did on doctrines of release—these being essentially metempsychosis and rebirth. The latter is touched upon obliquely in the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* as also in references to the idea of birth and death as a repetitive cycle. The concepts of *karma* and *saṃsāra* are developed more fully in Buddhist thought and become central to the Brahmanical tradition in the period after the Buddha had taught, when expiation for the present and preparation for a new birth becomes a major concern. Nevertheless the notion of heaven and hell remain a part of the popular imagery of the after-life and become substratum ideas often interwoven into the overarching theme of *karma* and *saṃsāra*. Renunciation is never aimed at the attaining of heaven, but has as its goal release from rebirth taking the more abstract form of *mokṣa*. Ultimately such an appeal could again be directed only to the limited few.

Renouncers, unconcerned with preaching their ideas to others and content either with a solitary existence or at most the company of others such as themselves, moved to forest retreats away from towns and villages, although close enough for the townsmen to know of their existence and if need be for them to supply alms. That this was not an ideal but an actuality is evident from, among other sources, the descriptions of such groups met with by Greeks visiting India either in the entourage of Alexander of Macedon or as ambassadors of his successors in West Asia (McCrindle 1877: 98–105). The hermitages referred to in Indian sources, set in forest clearings, were often the vanguard of the colonisation of the area by settlers of agriculturists with or without state backing. Such hermitages were often under threat by those who claimed the forest as their territory or hunting ground (Thapar 1978a).

In the dialectical relationship between the householder and the renouncer a crucial question related to when a man could opt out of his social obligations as a householder and become a renouncer. Buddhist and Jaina views did not stipulate *gṛhastha* as necessary. Some among them argued that it was necessary to forego the stage of *gṛhastha* so that renunciation becomes a truly parallel stream. The authors of the *dharmasūtras* insisted on *gṛhastha* as a precondition arguing that this made it more difficult to renounce the worldly life (*Baudhāyana* II.10.17.2–5; *Āpastamba* II.9.21). In these circles the debate hinged on the individual and the problem posed for the individual in the process of renunciation. In the *dharmasūtras* the question of whether a *brahmacārin* could proceed directly to *saṃnyāsa* and bypass the stage of *gṛhastha* was linked to the performance of one's social obligations. It may have been for this reason that there was also a difference of opinion as to whether *saṃnyāsa* should be restricted to *brāhmaṇas* (*Manu* VI. 1–38). It is frequently stated that *gṛhastha* is both crucial and necessary almost to the point of suggesting that true renunciation can only be attained once one has passed through the stage of *gṛhastha* (*Manu* VI.87ff), which makes renunciation all the more arduous. This insistence may have been an attempt to counteract the entry into monkhood at a young age which was being encouraged by Buddhists and Jainas. Renunciation coming after the completion of *gṛhastha*, would minimally affect the performance of social obligations. The bypassing of *gṛhastha* carried the danger of a decline in the performance of *yajñas* which would have been a serious curtailment of *dāna* for the *brāhmaṇas* and an erosion of the status and power of the Brahmanical tradition. In terms of social dissent too it would be a muffled protest. The possibility of its encouraging an alternate form of social organisation is guarded against by the insistence on celibacy. A curious reference in the *Baudhāyana dharmasūtra* (II.6.11.28) states that the renunciatory stages were the creation of an *asura* who wished to annoy the gods, since if men took to renunciation the gods would lose the offerings of the *yajñas*. This would point indirectly to, perhaps, an initial disapproval of renunciation and the possibility that it had to be conceded somewhat grudgingly. However, once it was conceded, it was taken up with great éclat.

Each of the *āśramas* is characterised by three phases which may be described as initiation, liminality and reintegration. Initiation was into a condition different from the previous one. Liminality related to the current *āśrama* carrying traces of the earlier one and a foretaste of the later. Reintegration completed the process and provided a new context and identity to the individual.

The ritual required for the *brahmacārin* was both a preparation for *gṛhastha* but also a taste for *saṃnyāsa*, thus suggesting that the essential dichotomy was the opposition between the *gṛhastha* and the *saṃnyāsin*. The *upanayana* or initiation of the male child was his formal entry into caste status and reflects an earlier ritual of initiation into the clan. Subsequent to the *upanayana* the boy was introduced to the first *āśrama* where he was placed under the tutelage of a guru or *ācārya* symbolising a spiritual father and reiterating his second birth and thus confirming his *dvija* status (*Āpastamba* I.1.1.16–18; *Vasiṣṭha* II.6). The emphasis therefore was on the transition from one status to another, non-*dvija* to *dvija*. The boy is regarded as a *śūdra* before the *upanayana*, a polluting category from which he emerges into *dvija* status. The *āśrama* theory was therefore also a social marker in which the *dvija* status was continually emphasised and a demarcation made through rituals of the separation from the *śūdras* and others. It anticipates renunciation by removing the boy from his familiar social milieu to the hermitage of the guru. The purification required was partly to do with the fact that biological birth is polluting and the pollution can only be fully removed by a second birth, the initiation into *varṇa* status and *brahmacarya*, an initiation which affected not merely the individual boy but also his place in the social matrix, his social status. The *brahmacārin* stage is a period of preparation requiring a study of the *Vedas* (the corpus of authoritative and revealed knowledge); the precepts of moral behaviour often strikingly similar to those which governed the life of renouncers; and the practice of austerity.

The *brahmacārin's* vows (*Baudhāyana* I.2.3.7ff; I.2.4.7ff; I.3.5. 1ff), such as celibacy, tending the guru and bringing him alms daily, sleeping on the bare ground and strict dietary rules are similar to the rules for novice monks in Buddhist monasteries. Celibacy and the prohibitions regarding the guru's wife emphasise the separation from women and the domestic sphere, which of course is reintroduced by contrast in the *gṛhastha* stage. The begging for alms (*bhikṣā*) would suggest that the guru's hermitage was in the vicinity of settlements and that the latter were in a position to support such hermitages. Evidently the forest here does not refer to the virtually inaccessible deep forest, but rather the *āraṇya* or waste land on the edges of settlements. The *brahmacārin* is invested with a staff (*daṇḍa*) which becomes an essential item for both the *saṃnyāsin* and the *bhikkhu*, so essential that some renouncers are referred to as *maskarin*, the bearers of the staff.

Recognisable differences in clothing and appurtenances as well as the period of stay were stipulated on the basis of caste differentiation (Apte 1954: 170ff, 182ff). To this extent there is dissimilarity with the novitiate period of monkhood. The Vedic texts studied were inevitably those of the *śākhā* to which the guru belonged, the particular *śākhā* thus receiving some secular support in terms of an investment in students who as householders would continue to be well-disposed towards their guru and his *śākhā*. The curriculum is suggestive of preparation for discourse rather than for householding and those who returned to their social obligations terminated the stage of *brahmacārin* earlier than the stipulated number of years. The highpoint of the termination ceremony was the ritual bath, hence the use of the term *snātaka*, and a mock triumphant return to the village and home from where the *brahmacārin* had originally set out. The first *āśrama* is rather like a prolonged initiation ritual with some preparation for the immediate future but with a stronger foretaste of the ultimate goal. It is characterised by separation from the social context, a period of liminality followed by a reintegration into the social context. The preparation provides an understanding of the social role of the householder in upholding the Brahmanical mores and tradition through sacrifices and the maintenance of the *brāhmaṇa*.

Marriage initiates the second *āśrama* of *gṛhastha*. Both Brahmanical and Buddhist sources continually stress the importance of this *āśrama* but for different reasons. The *dharmasūtras* maintain that it is the most important stage because the other three are dependent on it (*Baudhāyana* II.11.27; *Vasiṣṭha* VIII.14; *Gautama* III.3). Its prime function is the continuation of the family and the perpetuation of the *gṛhya* or domestic rituals. It is only the householding stage which permits of offspring and the successful householder provides material support for the others. The fire used for the marriage ritual is maintained without a break throughout the lifetime of the *gṛhastha* or as long as he remains in that condition, a custom which echoes that of the tending of the sacred fire by the kin members in clan based, societies.[4] The family fire was used for the various *yajñas* associated with rites of passage rituals, expiatory ceremonies, seasonal sacrifices, ceremonies dedicated to the ancestors and the worship of the quarters—in short all the rituals of a temporal and spatial context. The life of the *gṛhastha* was punctuated by actions relating to social obligations and few demands of an individual nature.

The two categories of people who can always draw on the householders' respect and hospitality were the *śrotrīya brāhmaṇa* and the guest (*atithi*)

(*Āpastamba* II.4.8.1ff; 4.9. 1ff; *Gautama* V.43–5), and often the two were identical. Generous hospitality would in such circumstances provide a means of indirect support for the *brāhmaṇas*, as indirect but highly effective as the performance of endless daily and seasonal sacrifices. The *gṛhapati* was the mainstay of the prestation economy in a situation of sedentary agriculture and where not every *brāhmaṇa* had access to the royal court and could enjoy the *dāna* emanating from the performance of royal sacrifices. The necessity of performing the *gṛhya* rituals was emphasised doubtless in part because the system of prestations was required to be maintained since the *brāhmaṇas* at least were dependent on it. Domestic rituals were also closely related to the household as a socio-economic unit, a self-sufficient body in terms of its daily needs since agricultural activities and minimal artisanal needs were controlled by the household. The rituals served to reiterate the status of each person in the household and more particularly the head of the household as indeed the *āśrama* theory served to demarcate the *dvija* family from its *śūdra* servants, slaves and retainers. The *atithi*, the one who does not stay permanently, was honoured as part of the code of honouring guests, but not anyone could claim this status and it was necessary to ascertain the identity of the guest before accepting him into the household. Hospitality to the guest was part of the wider system of being able to support 'the other'.

Buddhist texts focus more closely on the *gṛhapati*/householder in his social milieu and the householder is perhaps given even greater importance than in the Brahmanical tradition. It often includes the *upāsakas* or lay-followers and these are contrasted with the *bhikkhus* who are the renouncers. The householder is the source of *dāna*, the gift-giving which maintains the *saṇgha*. Since the *saṅgha* is an institutionalised body of renouncers it is dependent for its maintenance on the lay-followers. The householder and the renouncer, therefore, are counter-weights to each other in social balance and there is a clear cut distinction between the two. The institution of the *saṅgha* makes the pendant relationship much sharper than in the Brahmanical tradition. The householder is the source of recruitment to the monkhood since the monks are celibate. Support is extended by giving of alms and of donations of a material kind. This implies that it was the prime duty of the householder to ensure that he had access to wealth at all times. *Dāna* was, therefore, visualised as the giving of gifts but also the observing of certain rules of behaviour which as an ethic provided the basis of the accumulation of wealth.

Because of this it was necessary that the prestation economy in which wealth was destroyed in the rituals or else was given towards the maintenance of *brāhmaṇas*, be substituted by a code in which wealth could be conserved if not enhanced so that it could be donated not only to individual renouncers but to the institution as well. Not only was the conservation of wealth discouraged in the Brahmanical system but commercial wealth was despised since it was based on the repeated investment of wealth. The *saṅgha* on the contrary encouraged commercial wealth and investment, the ensuing surplus being required to support the institution of monks. The *yajña*, therefore, was replaced by an ethical code encouraging austerity and ensuring the conservation of wealth. The *gṛhastha* who opted out and became a monk was in a sense terminating a source of support for the *saṅgha* and this contradiction was sought to be solved by the concession made to the *upāsaka* who could attain merit without becoming a *bhikkhu*, although in the ultimate stage renunciation would be inevitable. The Buddhist tradition demanded austerity from the *gahapati* to ensure the continuance of wealth. Although it nowhere approached the condition of *tapas* it did encourage an empathy for renunciation, since wealth was not to be enjoyed hedonistically but was to be produced in order to provide *dāna* to the *saṅgha* and to meet social obligations. Such austerity is not enjoined upon the *gṛhastha* in the Brahmanical tradition. The good householder was constantly aware of the merit of almsgiving which has priority in the list of exalted qualities (Gahapativagga, *Aṅguttaranikāya* VIII.3.21–30; X.30ff). The *upāsaka* is one who conforms to the five virtues and abstains from taking life, stealing, lust, lying and intoxicants. He strives for his own welfare and that of others. The Buddha's teaching appeals to one who has few desires, is contented, secluded, energetic, composed and wise. Gift-giving can ensure rebirth in an easier life such as that of a wealthy *ksatriya*, *brāhmaṇa* or *gahapati*, surrounded by luxury: or alternatively a life in heaven. The threat of rebirth in animal form or the tortures of hell are held out to those who are niggardly in their *dāna* to the *bhikkhu* or the *saṅgha*.

Dāna as virtue is clarified in the Buddha's discourse to the householder Sigāla (Sigālovadasutta, *Dīghanikāya* XXXI.4). The replacing of ritual by ethical action is clearly stated when the Buddha tells him that the worship of the quarters does not consist of prescribed rituals but the avoidance of the fourteen evils of life. These are listed as the four vices in conduct: slaughtering life, stealing, lying and adultery; the four evil motives of action, partiality, hate, fear and dullness; and the six channels for dissipating wealth, the taking of intoxicants, roaming the streets at unseemly hours, going to fairs and festivals, gambling, keeping evil friends and idleness. It is significant that these are listed specifically as ways of dissipating wealth. Some of them result in harm to the family and to property and both of these have to be protected by the householder and are of course crucial to the continuity of social obligations and the maintenance of the *saṅgha*.

Family and property are again the crux of the ethic in the details of virtuous behaviour, and social obligations are spelt out in the description of what constitutes the worship of the four quarters from a non-Brahmanical perspective. The west is worshipped through the mutual concern of husbands and wives for each other and where the wife runs the daily business of the household deputising for her husband, and she is enjoined upon in doing so to safeguard the property of her husband. The north relates to clansmen and friends who are to be treated with generosity and benevolence. The eastern quarter is reserved for parents and the wider family. The southern quarter involves the care of one's teacher through respectful behaviour and diligence in learning. The substitute for the worship of the nadir revolves around relations between the master and his servants where the humane treatment of servants encourages them to work fully and loyally. The zenith symbolises the wider relationship between the householder and the *śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas* where the central concern is that he is to supply their needs and they in turn will guide him towards meritorious actions and heaven. Family and property are further emphasised when the Buddha states that the amassing of wealth is required of the good layman for it is through this that he benefits his clan. The procedure for amassing wealth is described as, spending a quarter of one's income on daily living, keeping another quarter in reserve and investing the remaining half in an enterprise which will result in monetary profit. Family and private property were believed to be crucial to the evolution of human society and the state according to Buddhist theory and they emerged from a pristine Utopian beginning in which both were initially absent. To the extent that the *gahapati* upholds family and property he is in a sense upholding the need for social sanctions and the authority of the state. By the same token the renouncer breaking away from family and private property represents a return to the pristine condition.

The third *āśrama*, that of *vānaprastha*, is referred to by many synonyms such as *vaikhānasa*, *parivrājaka* and *bhikṣu* and probably included the 'hylobioi' of Megasthenes (McCrindle 1877). The use of a number of terms points to a wide variety of renouncers conforming to degrees of renunciation seen as part of the social scene. The differences appear to have been partly doctrinal and partly based on varied observances, both of which overlapped to a greater or lesser extent from one group to another, covering a range from gentle isolation to a fierce regime of asceticism. The category, therefore, seems to refer more to the present of 'opters out' in society than to a specific and identifiable stage in life. The *vānaprastha* is required to live in the forest but can take his wife with him. There is a heavy emphasis on dietary rules which largely confined him to what he could collect in the forest (*Baudhāyana* II.6.11.12ff; III.3.13ff; *Āpastamba* II.9.23.2). He has to avoid living in or near inhabited places except in the period of the rains thus echoing the *vassa* period of Buddhist monks who were also permitted, closer contact with settled areas during this time of year. The *vānaprastha* may continue to perform, but in a modified fashion, some of the rituals of the *gṛhastha*, thus requiring in some cases that the sacrificial fire of the household be maintained even in the forest retreat. His clothing was restricted to the minimum. Nakedness or at least a change of clothing is important to all baptismal rituals. His head was shorn according to some texts or, alternatively, he refrained from cutting his hair. He prepared himself for the fourth and final stage through study and meditation, but if this was not his ambition he could terminate his life by living only on water and air and dying of slow starvation—an ideal which recalls the process of dying taken to by some Jaina monks.

Vānaprastha, therefore, was seen as a transition from *gṛhastha* to *saṃnyāsa* and as with all transitional stages is not very clearly defined. True renunciation was seen as *Saṃnyāsa*. A distinct ceremony marked the entry into the fourth and final stage and is defined by a complete break of ties with family, property and society and takes on the symbolic form of a death ritual. *Saṃnyāsa*, therefore, is a much more definitive action involving major changes than is *vānaprastha*. In a sense the would-be *saṃnyāsin* undergoes an excommunication ceremony but he is not regarded as defiling because although he breaks all social taboos he does so ritually and he exiles himself not out of having sinned but voluntarily. It was regarded as a worthy end to one who had fulfilled his social obligations. He takes the vows of the ascetic, abstention from injuring the living, from lying, from stealing and conformity to continence and liberality. He is permitted to accept alms from either *brāhmaṇas* or *dvijas* although in some texts even this is not permitted. That the isolation was not total in most cases is suggested by the term used by Pāṇini for ascetics. The *bhikṣu* is distinguished from the *tapasvin* (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* III.22.155, 168; V.2.102ff). Some follow the *bhiksu-sūtras* and are differentiated from others such as the *maskari parivrājaka* (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* IV.3.110ff; VI.1.). The fact of renunciation did not mitigate the competition among renouncers and their claims to have discovered the true path to salvation. The distinction among ascetic orders had to do with techniques for attaining *mokṣa* and less with ritual status. The initiation of the Buddhist monk was the *pabbajja/parivrājaka* ceremony, literally the 'going out' and since it could be undertaken at any age permission was sought from kinsmen to ensure that social obligations would not preclude the opting out (*Jātaka* IV.119; *Vinaya Piṭaka* I.82).

In the counter-posing of the householder to the renouncer the major obligations and characteristics of the one were deliberately and systematically negated by the other (Thapar 1978b). Initiation into *gṛhastha* was through the marriage ritual which is negated by the insistence of celibacy among renouncers. The *gṛhastha* was expected to build his life around the rearing of a family, observing the social norms required by the fact of living amidst others, worshipping his ancestors at the time of *śrāddha*, protecting and enhancing his property and labouring on his profession. The renouncer denied all this through the ritual by which he entered *saṃnyāsa* which was in effect a death rite. He was required to quench his sacrificial fire and dispose of his sacrificial implements. This is a subtle concession to the act of *yajña* being the stamp of the householder and those functioning within a temporal framework. The permission of the *vānaprastha* to perform *yajñas* indicates the degree to which he is still tied to householdership and removed from renunciation. The *saṃnyāsin* by breaking all taboos becomes ritually impure and cannot either perform the *yajña* or be a *yajamāna*. At the same time, *tapas* and *dhyāna* enable him eventually to reach a state of purity and power which supercede that of the yajña-performing *brāhmaṇa*. The renouncer has to forswear any ties with property, to break any attachment to person or place and in effect take to a life which required wandering from place to place and thereby precluded working at any profession. The break with social attachments was further emphasised by his taking on the outward symbols which made him recognisably a renouncer: being naked or sparsely clothed, either removing his hair or never cutting it, carrying a staff and an alms bowl and living either in a monastery, theoretically cordoned off from secular settlements, or living isolated in a forest.

The insistence that the renouncer was dead to the world was symbolic not merely of the break with society but also because death was seen as a condition in which the social order does not prevail. Although the rituals of death serve to enforce the social order for the living, physical death releases the person from that order. *Śrāddha* rituals were a generalised worship of ancestors, reincarnation involved a fresh entry into society and heaven at least had no social ordering. The performance of death rites negated the individual identity. *Saṃnyāsa* had a character of transcendence over death. The actual death ceremonies for the renouncer had therefore to be different from those of other *dvijas*. Instead of being cremated the ascetic was buried, often bound in a sitting position and his grave became a place of worship. (Curiously burial in the earliest source was associated with *asura* customs and these were regarded as socially alien to the Aryan.) In the case of the more venerable Buddhist monks, even though the body was cremated, relics were collected and buried in the tumulus (*stūpa/caitya*) erected to their memory. Thus even the physical body of the renouncer was treated differently on death. Pollution was not associated with his corpse and bodily relics could, therefore, be preserved. The individual *saṃnyāsin* did not require his descendants or peers to observe the *śrāddha* ritual for him as he was not listed as an ancestor and no continuity was sought. But among the *bhikkhus* and the *saṃnyāsins* who were part of a sectarian order, continuity was maintained though the line of succession in the monastery or the institutional *āśrama*, where both the oral tradition and literate history were the means of doing this. Important as this became to institutional requirements it subtracted from one of the original purposes of *saṃnyāsa*.

Food regulations were also distinctive. In the case of the *gṛhastha* food regulations relating to caste status and purity were worked out with the same theoretical finesse as were regulations regarding marriage. The higher the caste the more restricted was access to cooked food. The Buddhist and Jaina renouncers broke this tabu by insisting that only cooked food was acceptable as alms. *Brāhmaṇa* ascetics were also permitted this concession but it was preferable that they subsist on what they could glean from the forest. Intercaste commensality, prohibited to the *gṛhastha*, was enjoined upon the monk and the ascetic, the justification for this being that neither were regarded as caste members after renunciation.

Similarly, regulations regarding flesh foods observed by the *gṛhastha* were not required of the renouncers. The same held true for the consumption of alcohol and intoxicants although Buddhist ethics firmly prohibited these even to the *gṛhastha* as well and unlike the *brāhmaṇas* made no concessions to the taking of intoxicants even on ritual occasions.

The exclusion of women is evident at the stage of initiation and in that of renunciation. Descriptions of the *gṛhastha āśrama* take women for granted speaking of them almost in the tone of sacrificial implements. The descriptions of the *gahapati* in the Buddhist sources certainly makes much more of the role of women in householding. Women *parivrājikās* are referred to, some in their own right and some in the hermitages with their *parivrājikā* husbands. The Buddhist concession to women entering the nunnery was a major departure but its origins are concerned probably less with permitting them a search for salvation and more with the logic of permitting them an alternative life. Their necessity to the *gṛhastha* stage was doubtless sought to be reinforced by discouraging them from renunciation.

That the negation of caste implicit in all forms of renunciation raised some problems is evident from the difference of opinion in the *dharmasūtras* as to whether a *brāhmaṇa* alone should be permitted access to *saṃnyāsa* and, if not, whether *brāhmaṇas* should not carry some distinguishing marks such as the *śikhā* (top-knot) to indicate their original status. Buddhist renouncers by taking on a new name when they graduated to monkhood negated or at least disguised their caste origins.

The encouragement to the *gahapati* to enhance his wealth was again in contrast to the vow of poverty which both ascetic and monk were required to observe. Eventually poverty was to be dissociated from life in the monasteries when these ascetic institutions became wealthy property owners. Inscriptions dating to the Christian era refer to extensive donations made by monks and nuns to the *saṅgha* (*Epigraphia Indica* X. Nos. 1016, 1020, 1041, 1089). In times when kinship was the major avenue to property rights, the property of the *saṅgha* was jointly owned. When individual property rights prevailed, members of the *saṅgha* claimed similar rights. This change grew to sizeable dimensions by the latter half of the first millennium AD when Buddhist and Jaina monasteries competed for power and property with the *maṭhas* and *āśramas* of various Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects of renouncers (Lorenzen 1972; Nandi 1973; Sarma 1966). The accumulation of such property acquired through lavish donations by lay patrons, whether privately held by monks or jointly by the institution was restricted in its ownership to the institution, although shares in the property could be held by individual renouncers who were members of the institution (Gunawardana 1979: 77ff).

This dichotomy in attitudes to property is also linked up in some ways to another dichotomy, that of the village and the forest, the *grāma* and the *vana* or *āraṇya*. The word *grāma*, literally a village, refers by extension to all settlements and is, therefore, associated with the householder. By way of contrast, *āraṇya* represented the waste land, the wilderness, the forest which lay between settlements. This was the great unknown with all its hazards. It was the symbol of chaos against the known order of all settled society. It would be the natural habitat of those who had broken away from society and who were confident of perceiving order in the seeming chaos which surrounded them. At another level the forest was a place of refuge where those deliberately opting out of society because of their disillusionment with its order, would go as an escape. At yet another level it was the symbol of the start of a new system of an attempt to reorder the universe which was sought to be done by setting up monasteries on the edge of settlements. The forest was the habitat of other groups segmenting off from existing settlements and creating new *janapadas*, founding new political territorial units. Interwoven with the notion of exile and of going out was that of creating or starting a new order, as is evident from the origin myths of the *kṣatriya* clans as described in Buddhist literature. But even in these new units the distinction between *grāma* and *āraṇya* remained and in the history of Buddhism this was to be a dichotomy between those monks who preferred to preach in villages and remain close to the lay community and those who were concerned with the ultimate aim of monkhood, an aim which had no place for monastic property.

The argument that renunciation denied reciprocity and to this extent it denied a major focus in Hindu social action, would be tenable if renunciation did in fact remove the renouncer from social action. In effect the monastery (whether Buddhist and Jaina to begin with and of the various Hindu sects of a later period) evolves both into an institution within which reciprocity is a fundamental need and into an institution which functions as a major social and political force and has, therefore, to maintain reciprocal relations with society. Whereas an ideal renunciation does deny reciprocity, in fact, the institutions which it spawned were deeply involved with society. The isolated renouncer remained socially marginal if not ineffective, but the image and connotation of the renouncer when it was associated with social movements became a powerful force for mobilisation. The strength of such a force doubtless derived from the fact that renouncers were the only category of persons who could with impunity discard social mores.

In generalising about the renouncer a distinction has to be made between the individual *saṃnyāsin* and the monk who joins an order. Both are concerned with individual salvation and hence remove themselves from the social group to which they belong. Remaining with the social group would involve them in having to observe the *dharma* of the group both because of social obligations and in order to acquire a better *karma*. *Dharma* as viewed in the Brahmanical tradition relates to the *dharma* of each caste and is expressed in the interplay of the individual's *dharma* and that of his caste. The Buddhist concept of *dharma* is that of a universal category which can be subscribed to irrespective of caste. The contrast can perhaps best be seen in the discourse on the duty of the *kṣatriya* in the *Bhagvad gītā* where protection and the upholding of the *varṇāśramadharma* in its specificity is his concern and that of the king. In the Cakkavatti-sinha-nāda-sutta (*Dīghanikāya* III.58) the *cakravartin's* duty is to follow the precepts of the universal *dharma* applicable to all and to ensure the well-being of his people.

Renunciation in the Brahmanical tradition was restricted since it was initially open only to the *dvija*, the *śūdras* being excluded. The non-Brahmanical sects were open to *śūdras* as well as other castes. This in itself would require a universalistic *dharma* given the immense social divide between *dvijas* and *śūdras*. By the time of the *dharmaśāstras, śūdra* ascetics were disallowed as this would doubtless have upset the social order and would have opened up an avenue of authority to the *śūdra* if not access to some degree of upward mobility. The possibility of renunciation being open to *śūdras* could have been viewed with alarm since it would have resulted in materially the most productive segment in society taking up what seemed to be materially the most counter-productive occupation. The prohibition on *śūdras* ascetics does suggest that at the ideological level renouncers were not viewed as being so far removed from society as to be ineffectual.

The monk as renouncer does raise something of a contradiction. By joining an order he subjects himself to a new set of mores and to obligations to the order which would inevitably modify his personal search for salvation even though ultimately his release from the cycle of rebirth lay in his hands alone. The Buddha tells the monks that each should live as an island unto himself guided by the *dharma* which is common for all. Monastic living would however not have allowed for the full implementation of this position. The emphasis on the individual both in *saṃnyāsa* and monkhood accounts in part for the strengthening of the notions of a person's *punya* and *pāpa* which is apparent in the texts of the time.

The contradiction is evident from the frequency with which there are debates in the *saṅgha* on the issue of whether monks should devote themselves to their own salvation or whether they should be concerned with strengthening the *saṅgha* by attending to the needs of the lay following. The distinction between the *grāma* and the *āraṇya* are symbolic of this choice and these terms enter the discussion. The care of the lay following required the performing of ceremonies particularly those associated with 'rites of passage' as these were occasions when faith would be strengthened. The dual role of the monk was kept separate in the Brahmanical tradition by the separate functions of the *brāhmaṇa* and the *saṃnyāsin*. In the initial stages when the monks lived in rock shelters and caves the problem was marginal, but later with the establishment of large monasteries close to settlements, the problem became more complex. The solution lay either in monks breaking away and going to forest retreats or in maintaining that both meditation and preaching were required of the monk and that the two should not conflict.

Such a conflict is sought to be partially ameliorated by the emphasis of the Buddhists on the goal being more important than the method. Thus the Buddha argues that austerity for the purpose of self-mortification characteristic of some kinds of asceticism is inadequate: the fundamental question being that of the nature of the goal of self-mortification (*Dīghanikāya* III.2.25). Asceticism by itself is not sufficient. It has to be accompanied by the norm, the *dharma* which ensures escape from the corruption of life and from rebirth. The discipline of living in a monastery is part of the process towards attaining salvation, since the monastic order consists of a body of people all seeking salvation.

It may legitimately be asked why some groups of renouncers sought to organise themselves into orders. This was an increasingly frequent form taken by renouncers from the late first millennium AD. 'Hindu' sects of renouncers became common after the initial organisation established by Śaṅkarācārya in the ninth century AD. In subsequent centuries virtually every sect irrespective of its position in the spectrum of beliefs and forms of renunciation, was characterised by an institutional base. The search for individual liberation was not selfish and those who believed that they had found the way wished to enlighten others. The Buddhist parable of the raft where the raft symbolises enlightenment, insists that the raft be left for the use of others. Thus the creation of a sect for preaching the message was necessary. Monkhood obviously had the advantage that it allowed those who were seeking liberation and subscribing to a particular teaching to live together and thus facilitate the search.

That a body of renouncers had to have an institutional base also has to do with the nature of a caste society. Renouncers as we have seen were required, as it were, to 'de-caste' themselves. Having broken the rules of the *dvija* code, had they remained as individuals in society they would logically have been accorded *śūdra* status at best or been regarded as untouchables. Two *brāhmaṇa* novices wishing to become *bhikkhus* inform the Buddha that they are abused and reviled by other *brāhmaṇas* in whose eyes the novices have been lowered to *śūdra* status because of their joining the Buddhist order (*Dīghanikāya* III.81). It was, therefore, necessary that they be organised as a group outside society and yet with some links—as a parallel group with its own norms. The *brāhmaṇas* could well regard them as outcastes and their legitimacy, therefore, depended on their receiving public support in terms of recognition of their parallel or alternate system. The hierarchy of caste society was reinforced by attempting to reverse it in creating an egalitarian society of renouncers: the separation between the two societies was also reiterated. If the monastery reflected a search for an ideal society, its continuation would clearly be limited since it could not reproduce itself and was dependent on fresh recruitment. An unequal, hierarchical society could not be levelled nor opposed individually, but collective retreats based on egalitarian status, in theory if not in practice, were possible. The fear of the parallel society is demonstrated in the hostility in Brahmanical sources towards the heretical sects, whereas the individual *saṃnyāsin* although breaking the same caste rules is, nevertheless, revered.

It is a moot question whether the Buddha was aware of the political potential of the *saṅgha*. Initially the harking back of the *saṅgha* to the clan based societies may have suggested a role of opposition to the emergent monarchies which were feeling their way towards authoritarian state power at the time when Buddhism was beginning to acquire popularity. The possible opposition gave way eventually to mutual respect which may have been directed by the need to accept royal patronage. The bestowing of patronage was doubtless inspired by the personal religious proclivities of the heads of state but was combined perhaps with a political insight which saw these monastic orders as powerful networks of public opinion. Mutual respect was tempered by mutual adjustments. The monastery although it remained a parallel society was from time to time an accomplice of political authority in supporting the state system. The Buddha advised the monks to obey the king and agreed that royal officers and those who were under a judicial sentence should not be admitted to the *saṅgha* (*Vinaya piṭaka* I: 73–6). Bimbisāra, then ruling Magadha, in turn agreed to declare monks immune from judicial punishment. Monasteries, *maṭhas* and *āśramas* in the later period, even when they were large scale property owners with judicial and fiscal rights over villages, were, nevertheless, declared immune from interference by state officials.

Buddhist historiography tends to associate major changes in the *saṅgha* with heads of state, implying thereby, that changes originated from kings who were patrons of Buddhism rather than from the internal dynamics of the *saṅgha* functioning in changing historical situations. The most obvious example of this is the attribution to Aśoka Maurya of calling the Third Council at Pāṭaliputra (Thapar 1961: 41–5) and of acting thereby as midwife to the birth of the Theravāda sect. The association of political authority with such events could in some cases have been an after-thought on the part of the monk chroniclers who sought to integrate political authority with an event of primarily religious significance: although of course it can be argued that such events were not primarily of religious significance and did have a political repercussion even if not precisely in the manner portrayed by the chroniclers.[5] It is incorrect to maintain that the reign of Aśoka saw the earlier politicisation of Buddhism (Weber 1967: 206ff, 237ff) since this had occurred in the lifetime of the Buddha. The *saṅgha* emerged rather like 'a state within a state'. *Dāna* to the *saṅgha* meant, in addition to religious merit, support to a socio-political institution. The Buddhist network drew in a number of areas in varying stages of state formation, from the more flexible chiefships to the unified state. Where the *saṅgha* was established it rapidly became the focus of community life.

The political role of the *saṃnyāsin* is not without significance. The authority of the *saṃnyāsin* deriving from the fact of renunciation coupled with the powers of *tapas* and *dhyāna* was seen as a parallel authority to that of temporal power. With the decline of *yajña* as the sole source of sacral authority, the *saṃnyāsin* came to personify an even greater authority. The *saṃnyāsin*, if he so wished, could curb temporal power by using the energy which he had acquired through austerity and meditation. The later, didactic interpolations in the two epics raise the power of the ascetic higher than even that of the great deity of the sacrifices, Indra. Kings were fearful of the wrath of the *saṃnyāsin*. The *daṇḍa* carried by the *saṃnyāsin* was not merely a physical staff for it symbolised the power of coercion through an intangible source of strength. Far from being life-negating the renouncer was the symbol of power and was often treated as the counter-weight to temporal authority. It may be argued that by insisting that renunciation come at the end of the life-cycle, a subtle attempt was being made to diffuse a possible concentration of authority. The encouragement of individual renunciation as distinct from joining an order was in itself a form of diffusing the political potential of the renouncer. This is demonstrated in the changed role of the renouncer in the period subsequent to the mid-first millennium AD when the *maṭhas* and *āśramas* of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects were deeply involved in theories of meditation as well as problems of temporal power. The growth of these institutions changed the nature of dissent and conformity and the individual solitary renouncer tended to become a faded image. The increasing numbers of the orders of renouncers was feasible only insofar as they were permitted and protected by society.

The power of the renouncer had also to do with the fact that such groups and individuals were wrapped up in what might be called the non-orthodox understanding of knowledge. The initial absence of deities in this tradition and the break from the sacrificial ritual provided a rationalistic strain to much of their thought. There was, nevertheless, a claim to extra-sensory powers and the *saṃnyāsin* like the gods could conjure up visions of the universe and create the illusion of time, place and person. The Buddha discouraged the notion of *siddhi*, the almost magical power so deeply associated with renouncers, but the literature of Buddhism is replete with resort to such power when all else fails. Even the alchemical process was ultimately brought into such experiments with knowledge and was justified on the analogy that the process of sublimation and transmutation so central to alchemy was after all similar to that involved in the search for *mokṣa*. Besides, alchemy was centrally concerned with empirical processes of knowledge.

The more evidently rational theme was directed to the opposition of revealed knowledge and as was often the case with early civilisations (Lloyd 1979: 37ff), to the analysis of bodily functions and experiments with the body—the foundation of *yoga* and *prāṇāyāma*—which encouraged a more empirical understanding of man. Coupled with this empirical knowledge came the notion of causation so skilfully utilised in Buddhist thought. The somewhat primitive magic associated with the performance of *yajña* and the correct recitation of the *mantras* had to make space for the more sophisticated idea of controlling the body and the mind through *tapas, yoga, prāṇāyāma, dhyāna* and other such techniques with the ultimate aim of using this control if need be to perform superhuman feats. The emphasis shifts from man supplicating the gods and the supernatural to man generating the power to comprehend the universe and the supernatural from within himself.

The trend of investigating empirical knowledge received something of a setback in the post-first millennium AD when monastic centres as the nuclei of renouncers became economically self-sufficient through grants and endowments. The initiates, or at least those who were not involved in the arduous task of managing and administering the property owned by the institution and the villages over which it had authority, spent their time in writing scholarly commentaries and treatises on existing philosophical and theological texts. The empiricism of perceived knowledge gave way to hours of scholarly debate. The monastic system of encouraging literacy which was on occasion used by monks of low status to aspire to high positions was now reinforced by the vogue for scholasticism. The plethora of manuscripts which are a hallmark of these times came frequently from monastic or near-monastic centres of various ideological persuasions. As renouncers such groups had moved a long way from the genesis of the *saṃnyāsa āśrama* or *bhikkhu saṅgha*.

Seen from a diachronic perspective the *āśrama* theory was generated from an interaction of social needs, historical processes and ideological concerns. The historical background to the dichotomy of householder and renouncer suggests an initial situation where renunciation was not at the forefront of social consciousness in that the early lineage based society of Vedic times seemed to accept the prestation system centering on the sacrificial ritual. The renouncers were few and were concerned with the quest for comprehending the universe. Thus dissent from the existing systems was essentially an intellectual dissent and a search for alternatives or the articulation of a private world view and did not impinge on the householding society of the majority. Stratification in such a system was less marked since clan and kinship connections were the determinants of status.

The dichotomy of householder and renouncer assumed more serious proportions in the subsequent period when, as a result of various historical changes, sects of renouncers not only became more numerous but began to organise themselves on an institutional basis. The opting out into the forest and the cutting away from society was among many such groups purely symbolic, since the sects remained in the purview of settlements and lived off them. The renouncer had now to seek the aid of the householder and was dependent on the latter. The giving of aid not only encouraged the questioning of the Brahmanical tradition in terms of the inadequacy of *yajñas* but also threatened the very system of ritual and symbol on which the Brahmanical tradition was based. Such a questioning also had a theme of social protest which was not appreciated by those who regarded themselves as the inheritors of the tradition. There was a need, therefore, to clarify the dichotomous relationship by defining its relative functions and by setting limits to the social impact of renouncers. Thus whereas the Buddhist and the Jaina traditions, for example, encouraged the dichotomous categories in the role of the *gahapati* and the *bhikkhu*, the Brahmanical tradition sought to weaken it by weaving it into a single life-cycle.

Within this definition the *āśramas* were linked to the *varṇas* so that caste functions could be continued and dissent made less apparent. The exclusion of *śūdras* from this curriculum was important and telling since it acted not only as a social marker but also guaranteed a marginal change from renunciatory groups who would have to be drawn from the *dvijas*. It also prevented the *śūdra* from having access to the kind of powers associated with renouncers. This was further reinforced by encouraging the notion that ideally only *brāhmaṇas* should be permitted renunciation. It is significant that those who did not conform to the *āśrama* theory opposed all these attempts at circumvention. The actual formulation of the idea of *āśramas* into a theory dates to a period when the strength of renunciatory groups had become noticeable. The linking of the *āśrama* theory to that of *varṇa* ensured that *varṇa* functions would not be neglected. Those who were reluctant to accept or could not accept the *āśrama* ideal could function at least with the *varṇa-dharma*. Thus *śūdras* were required to observe the *varṇa-dharma*. This was in turn subjected to the individual measure of merit and demerit in action leading to the centrality of the notions of *puṇya* and *pāpa*.

The Brahmanical insistence, in the early historical period, that the individual *saṃnyāsin* alone could be regarded as a renouncer was not only an attempt to reiterate the earlier model but also to hold back the tide of the various orders of renouncers who were looked upon by the *brāhmaṇas* as heretics (*pāṣaṇḍas*). What were once marginal dissenters were by now taking on the dimensions of a serious opposition to the Brahmanical world view. Earlier, individual renouncers had not only been accommodated in the Brahmanical tradition but their charismatic power had been accepted as a legitimate source of authority. This concession was born out of a genuine fear that *yoga*, *tapas* and *dhyāna* enabled the renouncer to control the natural and the supernatural world as well as from the reassuring belief that the impact of this power on society has perforce to be limited and cannot undermine the existing system. However, the rapid growth of organised groups of renouncers brought about a qualitative change in the perception of the role of the renouncer. The individual *saṃnyāsin*, although still the ideal, was hedged in by the influence on society by the sects of renouncers. Ultimately the emergence of a Śaṅkarācārya and the organisation of Brahmanical ascetic orders was a logical outcome of this situation. But prior to this, in an atmosphere of a more generalised discussion on the interplay of householder and renouncer and the social obligations of each, the Brahmanical tradition passed through a period of anxiety. The *āśrama* theory may have been less of an idealist abstraction projecting an ordering of the ideal life-cycle for the *dvija* and particularly for the *brāhmaṇa*, and more of the ventriloquism of a Brahmanical perception of a time of troubles.

Notes and References

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1. *Yeśam ca virodhaḥ śāśvatikaḥ*. Patañjali *Vyākarana Mahābhāśyam*, I. p. 474, on Pāṇini, II.4.9. Other sources also refer to the dichotomy between *brāhmaṇas* and *śramaṇas* such as *Anguttaranikāya*, IV.35; Strabo, XV.1.59 in McCrindle. The etymology of *brāhmaṇa* indicates one imbued with divine knowledge which linked to Vedic knowledge. The terms *śramaṇa* and *āśrama* in both cases derive from the root *śram*, to labour or make an effort. The *śramaṇa*, therefore, is one who labours towards an objective and *āśrama* was the process of doing so. Eventually the place where the *śramaṇas* gathered was also called the *āśrama*. The differentiation between the *brāhmaṇa* and the *śramaṇa* was, therefore, clear and unambiguous.

2. By way of an aside one might consider in this context, the centrality of tragic plays in Greek culture. Did the public expression of emotions of sorrow and loneliness through the performance of such plays and through the cathartic experience of the audience prevent the obliteration of such emotions? The essence of Greek tragedy lay in forcing the audience to face emotional situations of a kind which in other cultures may have been treated as personal and private. And curiously the Greeks were not given to renunciation. But such an argument can perhaps be too simplistic.
3. The epic heroes of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* were, in the interpolated later sections of the text, supporters of the *gṛhastha āśrama*. They do not contemplate *saṃnyāsa* as a possible condition for themselves. When in exile they come into contact with renouncers and on occasion have to protect the renouncers against their enemies although the renouncers are frequently forest hermits still maintaining the sacrificial ritual and suggesting thereby that they were not *saṃnyāsins*. Only in one version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the early first millennium AD composition of the Jaina adaptation in the *Paumacariyam*, does Rāma renounce his kingdom in his later years and becomes a Jaina ascetic—and the *Paumacariyam* is already far removed from a heroic ethos.
4. One is here reminded of the discussion in Fustel de Coulanges (1864) on the significance of the sacred fire in claims to kinship and in family cults associated with it.
5. The relationship between the Buddhist *saṅgha* and the political state has been analysed in considerable detail with reference to the situation in early historical Sri Lanka. The Ceylon chronicles, especially the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvaṃsa*, are an invaluable source for indicating this relationship and a number of studies have been based on this (Geiger 1908; Perera 1976; Bechert 1978). Another study treats of this relationship with reference to Thailand (Tambiah 1976). There is undoubtedly a strong tradition in Sri Lanka of associating major changes in the *saṅgha* with political events. Recent attempts to suggest that reforms within the *saṅgha* in the last two centuries were motivated by internal developments within the *saṅgha* and did not seek external legitimisation, fail to explain the departure from tradition and in themselves are not very convincingly argued (see Carrithers 1979).

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8

*Millenarianism and Religion in Early India**

Millenarian movements are the outcome of a dissatisfaction with the present expressed in a religious idiom and which focus on a belief that a perfect society will be established through divine intervention. The term 'millenarianism' has now come to include a variety of protest movements. Initial interest in millenarian movements included a perspective which regarded them as the paranoid fantasy of a group unable to accept reality (Cohn 1957). They were viewed with the same suspicion as were shamans, mystics, mantics and ascetics. It was unclear whether the leaders of such movements were the manifestations of a disturbed personality or whether they were attempting to restore normalcy in a disturbed society (Durkheim, Elwin, Bellah, Lewis). It has also been argued that these were revolutionary movements of change, integrating conflict through new ideologies, fostering self-respect and linking religion to a political message (Hill, Worsley). The emphasis in the analysis of such movements has shifted from a concern in the main with eschatology to a recognition of the importance of attitudes to power (Burridge). Whether many of the movements which arose in a colonial context can be called millenarian is a point which has been debated at some length, and alternative labels such as 'nativistic' or 'revitalisation' movements have been suggested (Linton, Wallace, Krader, Jay). If the perspective is widened from just the religious idiom to include the problems which give rise to such movements then millenarianism can be seen as part of a much larger concern with the expression of dissent. The religious idiom draws on what might be called a transcendental sanction but what distinguishes millenarianism in turn from other movements claiming this sanction is that history is viewed as directed towards a futuristic if not an apocalyptic vision. These movements see themselves as hyphens between the past and the future; and it is the virtual negation of the present which further differentiates them from other movements of protest, dissent and rebellion. The attempt is not to change the present and remove the cause of dissatisfaction but to await the coming of a perfect future.

The millennial idea developed in a Judeo-Christian context although Zoroastrianism provided some seminal thoughts. The Judeo-Christian roots are traced to the Book of Daniel and the Revelations of St John and the apocalyptic texts dating to the late first millennium BC and the early first millennium AD. This was a time of crisis, for Judaism in the earlier period and Christianity in the later. Both were struggling to remain firm in the face of the more powerful religions associated with the four empires, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Hellenistic and the Roman. Messianic hopes for Judaism were therefore prominent. Christian millenarianism had its roots in opposition to the Roman empire but by the second millennium AD hostility was directed against the established Church. Millenarianism was the term used to describe the doctrine or belief in the coming of the millennium, when for a thousand years, Christ would return and preside over the fate of individual men and women. The history of man was seen as a continuum between the pristine Utopia of creation and the ultimate return to paradise whether in heaven or on earth.

The concept of the millennial was not entirely absent in other religious traditions. The Mahdi in Islam has distinct millennial overtones and these are evident in the Shi'a tradition as well. In Buddhism the Buddha Maitreya, the Buddha yet to come was touched upon in the early Pāli texts but the idea was developed more fully in later Buddhism. Among Hindu sects, the Vaiṣṇava carries an element of millennial ideas in the theory of the various incarnations of Viṣṇu which occur in periods of crisis. The human incarnations in particular can be seen, apart from other things, as parallel to figures of redemption. The possibility of multiple incarnations to alleviate suffering would however have weakened the notion of the single messiah and the ultimate redemption. The closest to millennial thought is the coming of Kalkin the final incarnation of Viṣṇu, which is yet to be. Thus although the concept is not absent in other religions it has a more central position in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Alternatively it could be suggested that it was expressed in a different way in the religions other than the

Judeo-Christian and Islamic, and has yet to be recognised as parallel to Judeo-Christian millenarianism. The elements of eschatology and prophecy, central to millenarianism, would have to be examined in these religions.

Apocalyptic ideas play a crucial role in eschatology. For the historian this has the added interest that it points to a distinct and definitive intervention by God or Deity in human destiny and this intervention is to be recognised by a series of unprecedented events, generally of a catastrophic nature. The influence of Zoroastrianism is evident in the concept of the struggle between the forces of light and darkness, the final judgement of the deity in favour of the forces of light and the condemnation to burning of the forces of darkness. The ultimate intervention of the deity brings the hope of salvation which, in a situation of crisis, could be imminent. The Christian tradition elaborated these ideas and included the resurrection of the dead at the time of the last Judgement and the final Redemption.

Religious movements characterised by a millenarian eschatology therefore expect 'imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly collective salvation' (Cohn 1962; Talmon). Salvation is thus preordained, is expected at a particular point in time and cannot be thwarted. The linear form of time emphasises the inevitability of the coming of the millennial. The present becomes incidental for time is seen largely as the past and the future. History is important both as the configuration of the past and as the expected form of the future. Salvation is not only collective but a sharp demarcation is made between the followers and the non-followers. Salvation is brought by a redeemer who mediates between the human and the divine and is generally a charismatic leader making messianic claims.

Some of these features present problems to the non-Semitic Asian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. The nature of salvation differs and translates better as liberation. There is an absence of the eschatology of a final Judgement Day for liberation lies in freedom from rebirth. Even at the popular level where the heaven of Indra was sought after death, the notion of a final Judgement Day is absent since entry into Indra's heaven is in itself the final act—a statement which is so vividly portrayed in the sculptured panels of many hero-stones commemorating the death of a hero. Hierarchical tiers of heaven and hell are depicted in some aspects of Buddhist cosmology, but the notion of a Judgement Day is again absent for the ultimate goal for salvation seekers is *nirvāna*. Freedom from rebirth and the attainment of *nirvāna* has led to a wide-ranging discussion on what is meant by *nirvāna* both in the Buddhist texts and in the interpretation of these texts (Radhakrishnan, 446–53, 600–5; Dutt, 187ff; Welbon). What is clear is that *nirvāna* is neither imminent nor collective. Even more important release from rebirth can only be achieved by the individual through his own effort. It involves not a collectivity of behaviour and action but the effort of a lone person often in isolation. Even the theory of the transfer of merit in later Buddhism emphasised the individual as the recipient accumulating merit for his own liberation. In the Hindu tradition perhaps the nearest affinity to the idea of collective *mokṣa* comes in the concept of *bhakti* where the individual expresses his devotion, love and loyalty to a particular deity as part of a *bhakti* sect. But this devotion involves him only marginally with others in an identity of worship and the belief that the deity would ensure the liberation of all. However the deity could be incarnated and could provide individual salvation. It is interesting that the period of the rise of the *bhakti* tradition in northern India, follows after the closest approximation to the millenarian idea in Vaiṣṇavism, namely that of the coming of Kalki.

Differences in time concepts may suggest an explanation for theoretical divergences but the differences decrease on a detailed consideration of the concepts. Hindu and Buddhist time concepts were not linear but there was an inevitability in the pattern of the human condition in time. Time was seen in a cyclic form, with the cycle or *mahāyuga* either terminating in the destruction accompanying the end of the cycle or witnessing the rise of a new cycle when the original had been completed. The measurement of time was outside the bounds as it were, of human computation (MacGovern, 45ff) and was often described spatially (e.g., *Saṃyukta Nikāya*, XV. 1.5–8). Cyclic concepts were not necessarily nihilistic. The upswings of the cycle in Buddhist cosmology were positive in nature and there were certain segments of time which were associated with the appearance of a Buddha. Cyclic movement therefore envisaged a variation in which human suffering could be partially alleviated by the coming of a Buddha. The pursuit of virtue and the discarding of evil actions by men would hasten the coming of better times (e.g., *Dīgha Nikāya*, I.73ff). The awaiting of the utopia was not altogether passive. The moral decline of society inherent in the Hindu notion of cyclic time when the Kali-yuga comes near to a close, was offset by the appearance of Kalkin at the end of the cycle. The actions of Kalki would lead to the rise of a new *mahāyuga*, the initial phase of which would be the utopian conditions prevalent in the first of the time cycles, the Kṛta-yuga. This notion carried an inevitability which was almost parallel to that of the eschatology in linear time, although the inevitability was not of a final and eternal salvation but of a promise of better things to come. The ultimate Utopia is to be created on earth and not in heaven. Heaven and hell are in a sense transitional. This is made very explicit in the Jaina tradition where the twenty-four *tirthānkaras* yet to come, headed by Padmanābha, are currently men and women who are fulfilling their *karma* either in heaven or hell and will be reborn to assist in the salvation of all mankind (Stevenson 1915, pp. 275ff).

The historical moment at which a millenarian idea is brought into play and the person through whom it is channelled are both of considerable consequence. In the Pāli texts, the marginal importance of the Buddha Maitreya in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (III.75ff) is developed further in the *Anāgatavaṃsa*. The *Mahāvaṃsa* (XXXII.72ff) weaves the idea closely into Sinhalese politics by associating him with Duṭṭhagāmiṇi who, it is said, would go to the Tuṣita heaven on his death and become the first disciple of the Buddha Metteyya when the latter appears on earth. Duṭṭhagāmiṇi was the hero of the Sinhalese, responsible for establishing a kingdom in Sri Lanka after defeating the Ḍamila king Elāṛa, and even more important was regarded as a great patron of the *saṅgha*. The mythical saviour figure is sought to be linked with a historical person thought to be playing a similar role.

That the presence or absence of millennial ideas is not solely a matter of eschatology and time concepts but has also to be viewed in the light of particular kinds of social organisation, needs to be emphasised. Many societies in their early history expressed social concerns in what we today regard as a religious form: others by the very nature of their social organisation used the idiom of religion as a reference to a wider area of social concern than has been conceded by modern commentators. In the Indian tradition the effective questioning of or breaking away from caste obligations, which were the framework of caste society, often required recourse to religious expression. This derived substantially from the logic of caste society in which the non-observance of caste norms would otherwise have resulted in ostracism and low status. An analysis of dissent in such a society would require a greater co-relating of social norms and the possibility of dissent open to the society, than has been generally recognised (Thapar 1979).

A major requirement of the millenarian movement is the prophet, the redeemer or the charismatic leader who mediates between the human and the supernatural. In a sense religious movements generally require such leadership. What distinguishes the leader of a millennial movement from the others is that he is more of a prophet and his message hinges on prophecy of a particular kind. In the Semitic religious tradition the concept of the prophet is clear and central. By contrast it is largely absent in other major Asian religions. In Hinduism and Buddhism, claims to comprehension of the transcendental or communion with the supernatural require isolation, the virtual opting out of the individual from social obligations and if necessary entry into the alternative or parallel society of the monastery which is built on a contravening of existing social obligations. In such religions the ascetic and the renouncer are more crucial than the prophet. Renouncers, referred to as the *parivrājaka* and the *bhikkṣu*, did not isolate themselves completely as was required of ascetics and often lived on the edges of settlements either individually or in groups, which led inevitably to a nexus between the renouncer and society (Thapar 1978).

Millenarian leaders evoke dedication and a fervour which is expressed either in the abandonment of self-control or in stringent self-discipline (Talmon). The ritual can at times deliberately break accepted social taboos. Renouncers in most cases opted for stringent self-discipline (although examples of the abandonment of self-control are known from later periods and other traditions). This was in part an insistence on a differentiation between themselves and the householders, that is between those who had opted out of maintaining social obligations and those who were at the very centre of social gravity (Thapar 1981). There were differences in visual appearance, an insistence on celibacy and the professed egalitarianism in the orders was in theory at least the opposite of the hierarchically ordered caste society and the political state of monarchy (Thapar 1978). The questioning of the efficacy of the sacrificial ritual was a negation of established religious practices. To the extent that renouncers were protestors, it was protest through withdrawal and not through active revolt or the mobilising of aggression (Cohn 1962).

In the initial phases of many renunciatory movements the renouncer was in a sense a liminal person where liminality represents a threshold condition (Turner) and one which placed the renouncer outside the legally structured society. The authority which he claimed was in part derived from the power of asceticism which over the centuries accumulated its own mythology. Equally important was his role as mediator. Periods of historical change are often characterised by the emergence of mediators. Where the familiar foci of authority was being superceded by other forms, there the presence of the renouncer as a constant factor was reassuring. The ideal of the *bodhisattva* enhanced the notion of mediation, for the *bodhisattva* postponed his own salvation in order to help others towards theirs. The Buddha Maitreya is on occasion described as a *bodhisattva*. The mediational role also required an explanation of social iniquities, the rationale for which was given in the doctrine of transmigration and rebirth which tended to place the responsibility for seeming injustice in the hands of the individual. This sharpened the dependence on the mediator who could help in the acquiring of merit and freedom from rebirth. The mediational role of the renouncers may have partly accounted for the relative marginality of the millennial idea in early Buddhism. As long as the monastic order was secure from competition and had access to patronage in the form of grants of land and interest from monetary investments (*Epigraphia Indica*, 1909–10) invoking the Buddha Maitreya was not imperative. An additional factor may have been that in both Buddhism and Vaiṣṇava Hinduism the ecclesiastical system was nascent at this time. The dues and demands from the ecclesiastical hierarchy on the laity were not strictly prescribed, as they were in Catholic Europe and were not therefore conducive to protest and criticism from lay followers.

Millenarianism derives its strength from those who are socially excluded, those who feel they are deprived of wealth and power and those who are poor and have lost their traditional roots. They can be enthused through apocalyptic visions into protest. But the enthusing has to be done by one who claims to be a prophet or else speaks in the voice of a prophet. For such people the renouncer may not hold sufficient hope even though there is a flavour of the millennial leader in his role. It could perhaps be suggested that the presence of the renouncer weakened the need for a prophet or alternatively that the weakness of the millennial idea in some religions may be partially explained by the absence of the prophet. A distinction has been posited between what has been called ethical asceticism and ethical prophecy (Obeyesekare). The message of the former is derived from meditation and is essentially a precept from which deities are absent. It may remain neutral in relation to the social order, although some scholars do not see it as neutral (Tambiah). Ethical prophecy on the other hand is the vehicle of the transcendental in which the deity is a necessary cause since the message is a proclamation of the Divine Will and may well conflict with pre-existing religions and the secular order.

The association of millenarianism with groups who feel they are deprived is seen as a characteristic of millennial movements. Such groups are naturally attracted to the myth of being the chosen people since it plays to the fantasy of the reversal of roles (Talmon). However, it has been argued that deprivation in this case is a relative term and it is not necessarily always those at the bottom of the social hierarchy who are drawn into millennial movements. Nor is it in itself a sufficient cause. Deprivation may relate to those who once had access to power which access is later cut off (Aberle). This would largely explain the notion of Kalkin in the Brahmanical texts. Kalki was to be the saviour of the upper castes and more particularly the *brāhmaṇas* who felt threatened by the rise to power of lower social groups, such as the *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* (Yadava). In this case there was also the conflict between two kinds of power, the sacerdotal Brahmanical status and the *kṣatriya* access to political power which was relatively open to groups considered low in caste ranking.

At the turn of the millennia BC–AD northern India had been subjected to invasions and rule of Central Asian peoples. Even in areas not so subjected families of low status were able to establish dynasties (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV.24; Pargiter), and as yet did not require legitimation through Brahmanical ritual. Inspite of the prosperity of many, such as those involved in the manufacture of goods and in trade, from the Brahmanical perspective this was a time of troubles registering a decline in traditional social regulations and witnessing the establishing of heretical religions. The Brahmanical version of how society should be ordered was upset and even slaves and *śūdras* were said to be resentful of serving the twice-born (*Vana Parvan* 188.64ff; *Śānti Parvan* 254.39ff). The 'heretical' religions because they discouraged Brahmanical rituals were regarded as the channel through which the traditional power and authority of the *brāhmaṇas* had decreased. The economy of urban areas based on trade and money and which had encouraged the prosperity of the Buddhist and Jaina *saṅghas* remained largely alien to the *brāhmaṇas* who had derived their wealth substantially from gifts and grants of land as fee for sacrificial rituals. A decline in these rituals led to their fearing an ultimate decline in their wealth. They were apprehensive that their claim to exemption from paying taxes would not be honoured and it was prophecied that they would have to flee from the burden of taxes (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV.24). The *brāhmaṇas* did not espouse the cause of the poor and the most deprived (such as the peasants who were facing a growing range of taxes), for, the resentment was against those of lower status who had used the changed times to improve their status. As one text puts it, 'the despised will rise to the middle and those of the middle will be ranked as the lowest' (*Vana Parvan* 188.18ff). For the *brāhmaṇas* it was indeed 'the world turned upside down'. Needless to say Kalkin was to be a *brāhmaṇa* and at the same time a king, resplendent in armour, destroying the lowly barbarians (*mleccha*) and the usurpers of status and power, and was to make over the earth to the twice-born upper castes with appropriate ritual sacrifices (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV.24; *Vana Parvan* 188.85ff). The manifestation of Kalkin it is said will purify the minds of people and with the coming of enlightenment the Kṛta age, the start of a fresh *mahāyuga* will be initiated (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV.24).

The inevitability of decline as a process in time is also stressed in Buddhist texts. An indirect reference to the Kali age is made in the *Mahāsupina Jātaka* (No. 77 Fausboll 335ff) where the king of Kosala has sixteen great dreams pertaining to an age to come. The message of the dreams as interpreted by the Buddha is terrifying but the king is reassured that the dreams are prophecies of a time which lies in the distant future. The dreams portend calamities such as drought and the growth of evil and unrighteousness. Those of noble birth will be degraded and the low will rise in status. The peasants will be oppressed and crushed as if in a sugar-cane mill and many will flee to the borders of the kingdom. The desertion of towns and villages implied the decline of the *saṅgha* and this is made more explicit by the statement that the *bhikkhus* will preach not to further the doctrine but for money. Again the fear is not that the lowest and the most deprived will revolt, in fact they are said to be the worst sufferers. The prognosis indicates lower status people being appointed to high office with upstarts claiming the rank and property of the old nobility. The future is envisaged not as a confrontation between the powerful and those without any power but rather the acquiring of greater power by those with relatively less power; a change in the role of intermediary groups competing for power.

Millenarian fantasies do occur in situations of evident social change or of conflicting or discrepant systems in society (Talmon 1966). They suggest an attempt at re-establishing the self respect of groups which feel that they have lost status and wish to establish a new identity in the midst of change and search for a coherent system of values where earlier values have been challenged if not discarded. The projection of the coming of Kalkin if carefully analysed tells us much more about social anxieties than many of the texts of the period would allow. For the historian the occurrence of millennial ideas is not merely the indication of a movement, but of wider social changes which can be argued back from the nature of the movement.

The popularity of the cult of the Buddha Maitreya in the northern tradition seems to have derived from a more complex historical situation. The juxtaposition of a number of competing religions along the routes linking India, Iran, central Asia and east Asia—areas where the cult was widespread—provided the historical context. Competition would point to some insecurity in acquiring patronage. Elements of Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Christianity doubtless contributed to the form taken by the cult but the germinal idea is traced to the *Dīgha Nikāya* and the prediction of a Buddha yet to come. Maitreya dwells in the Tuṣita heaven and will appear after evil has increased and the time-cycle has neared its end, or, as others maintain, after a lapse of five hundred, a thousand or five thousand years. But the worship of the Buddha Maitreya was not just a millennial cult. Unlike the return of Christ, Maitreya was a different Buddha from Gautama. His future coming was only one aspect of his larger role as the Buddha of love and compassion helping in the liberation of all. The worship of Maitreya before his descent from the Tuṣita heaven was a subtle form of extending the idea of release from rebirth to situations other than the perfect future. The cult of the Buddha Maitreya would not therefore in every case be linked to millenarianism.

Fa Hsien visiting the Indian subcontinent in the fifth century AD records a statement made by an Indian devotee whom he meets in Sri Lanka, that predictions were current at the time, regarding the future of the doctrine. Among these was the prophecy of the Buddha Maitreya. When men become short-lived, evil and start killing one another, those that remain faithful to the teachings of the Buddha will hide in the mountains and will emerge only on the death of the evil ones to re-establish a virtuous society and await the coming of Maitreya. The Buddha Maitreya will appear and assist the faithful to attain *nirvāṇa* and convert others to the doctrine. Fa Hsien makes a special note of the devotee telling him that this information was not written in any of the scriptures and was presumably part of the oral tradition (Legge 1886, pp. 109–10). Hsüan Tsang writing in the seventh century quotes a similar story while visiting monasteries in the middle Ganga valley. It is said that the Buddha had predicted the coming of Maitreya. He would be born in a *brāhmaṇa* family, would preach the doctrine and would hold three great assemblies to ensure the liberation of those then living (S. Beal 1884, I. pp. 30, 78–9, II. pp. 46–7). (In the distinction between pre- and post-millenarian ideology, the Maitreya story would conform to the latter which requires an anticipatory period in which people perfect themselves for the millennial (Shepperson). An echo of the renouncer is introduced into the story when Hsüan Tsang refers to various renowned Elders who lived hidden in the mountains awaiting the coming of Maitreya. The relevance of the millenarian Maitreya in the *madhya-deśa* of northern India by this time may have been due to the gradual decline of Buddhism in this area as is evident from Hsüan Tsang's account. The patronage of the state and of the wealthy having decreased, the doctrine seems to have fled to the more peripheral areas of northern India. The compassionate tone of the Buddha Maitreya story contrasts sharply with the strident voice predicting the coming of Kalkin. Perhaps the difference lay in liberation being the primary purpose of the coming of Maitreya whereas Kalki's concern was to restore power and wealth to the upper castes.

The Buddha Maitreya cult however was not as widespread in India as it was in the Buddhism of central and eastern Asia. The political upheavals in the oasis-states of central Asia with confrontations between nomadic and sedentary cultures created a situation of flux and insecurity in which a millennial figure would have provided a much-needed sense of psychological security. The significance of Maitreya in China may have been linked to Buddhism having to compete initially with well-established religious cults patronised by the court. The millennial hope may have been an undercurrent in the effort to attract a following. The peak period of the cult in the mid-first millennium AD appears to coincide with hostility to Buddhism among the Chinese elite (Zurcher, 254ff) and becomes less evident once the religion is firmly established. It might be worth examining possible connections between the Buddha Maitreya cult and the evolution of urban centres in these areas where such centres were also the meeting point of cross-cultural ideas. The anonymity of towns attracts protestors and the activity of itinerant merchants and middlemen encourages the peddling of goods as well as ideas. Initially the notion of the millennial in the Judeo-Christian tradition arose among groups with urban, cosmopolitan associations as is also expressed in the key position of the city, the New Jerusalem, in the vision of the future. The organisation of peasants around millennial ideas in Europe in the second millennium AD was frequently inspired by urban leaders of Christian sects such as the Cathars, Taborites, Anabaptists, which had divergent views from those of the established Church. English millenarianism of the seventeenth century—the Diggers, Seekers, Ranters, Quakers, Muggletonians and Fifth Monarchy Men—had its roots in an urban environment (Hill, Capp, Elliot, Lamont). The rise of such cults among peasant communities and in segmentary or lineage-based societies seems to make its appearance in more recent times.

The term millenarianism has now been extended to include a variety of movements closely related to peasant discontent and to various expressions of antipathy or hostility to colonial rule. Some of these movements may not be strictly millenarian in their ideology although their political and social aspirations are similar. It has been argued that the movements tend to be pre-political in segmentary societies and politically more developed in peasant societies or where the movement arises with the decline of established political power or in confrontation with colonial power (Worsley). Peasants uprooted as a result of changes in agrarian structure introduced by colonialism saw themselves outside the system as did the urban poor. In colonial situations millenarian movements often arose in the intersections of indigenous and colonial cultures and became the means by which aspects of the latter were internalised by the former (Stern). The disruption of the existing patterns of power through colonial interference was often at the root of more recent movements. The criterion of what constitutes power needs to be looked at in greater detail. In a sense all millennial movements have been struggles in the context of power where the struggle is expressed in a cultural idiom which may disguise the crux of the conflict. Claims to mystic visions and communion with the transcendental constituted one kind of power which, as a motivator of social action should not be underestimated. But equally important was the concern with the hard realities of power: the state, and wealth in the form of valued objects, land and money.

The original millenarian movements were hostile to monarchies. Curiously however, the structure of the eschatological vision reflects the imprint of the monarchical state: the vision of the deity in Judgement parallels the monarch in his court, glittering with fabulous wealth and the notion of judgement and the trappings of Judgement Day draw on the working of monarchical administration. The impact of monarchical power as an over-arching political form was undoubtedly substantial. Implicit in the allegory of the Day of Judgement is the transference of that power and its control to those who in reality were without power. The Fifth Monarchy was similar to the first Four but for the fact that the deprived saw themselves as the forces of righteousness and the inheritors of power. Kalki although born a *brāhmaṇa* is envisaged as a *kṣatriya* king, leading warriors and re-establishing the power of the *brāhmaṇas*. The image combines military and monarchical strength. Only the Buddha Maitreya is without the glamour of state power. Millenarian beliefs therefore can be compatible with ideological conservatism (Elliot), and not all such movements are essentially protest movements supporting radical change (Lamont).

Land as a source of both wealth and power is crucial to millennial movements involving peasants. Peasant revolts in India are recorded in the second millennium AD. Prior to that, peasant migration (generally because of oppressive taxes) and peasants deserting their land were the forms of peasant protest (Thapar 1979). The change from migration to revolt has featured in the widely debated theory of the moral economy of the peasant (Scott). Migration to new, cultivable land would in part account for the absence of peasant revolts. With the intensification of agriculture and more land being brought under cultivation the easy accessibility of new land would have declined. Apart from this the agrarian system of the early second millennium AD with its hierarchy of intermediaries, hemmed in the peasant and made it more difficult for peasants to migrate. Peasant revolts in south India in the thirteenth century seem to have been triggered off by excessive taxation within this structure (Karashima). The co-relation of demography to the availability of easily cultivable land might provide an additional perspective on peasant movements. The echoes of millenarianism in the Satnami revolt of the seventeenth century and the Santhal rebellions and the Birsa Munda movement of more recent times (Roy; Fuchs) may have been due to the proximity of Islam and Christianity. But the movements attracted low status peasants fearful about the large scale encroachments onto their land, their inability to pay taxes and their observation that money was one of the means by which land was lost or snatched away. Peasant involvement in movements of a millennial nature is historically later in India than the involvement of other social groups. This would suggest a possible corollary to the definition of millennial movements: protesting groups should perceive of their relation with the rest of society as being one where their withdrawal or revolt can affect the well-being of the society. The use of millenarianism by various social groups would therefore require an awareness on their part of their economic and social significance to society, irrespective of their actual status.

Millenarian movements therefore ostensibly involve groups led by persons using an apocalyptic vision and drawing on an ideology which anticipates a perfect future coming at a particular point in time through the intervention of the supernatural. Such groups in effect are dissatisfied with existing conditions, suffer from a sense of deprivation, seek power and status, are conscious of a lack of material wealth or fear its decrease and see their action as having an impact on the well-being of the social whole. It is often these effective realities which constitute the need for protesting and the protest is expressed in a religious idiom. The proto-type draws on the Judeo-Christian tradition but elements of millenarianism appear to be present in societies subscribing to other religious idioms. Where millenarianism is not evident it might be worth investigating whether there are alternate forms of protest which arise from the same causes and achieve similar results but whose apocalyptic allegories might be different.

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9

The Purāṇas

Heresy and the Vaṃśānucarita*

The *Purāṇa* as a genre is referred to in the *Vedas* both individually as were the *gāthās, nāraśamsis, akhyānas,* and others; and as a compound as in *itihāsa-purāṇa.*[1] The distinctions among the former are not invariable. The category of *purāṇa* refers to that which is believed to be of the ancient past. In this sense it includes mythology as well as what might have been projected as a historical tradition. When *purāṇa* becomes the label for a distinctive genre of texts by the mid-first millennium AD it is better defined, is associated with an author however mythical he may have been, and is included as part of a tradition. This was said to have been originally associated primarily with the bards—the *sūta* and the *māgadha*—who together with the *vandin,* eulogist, and *cāranas,* professional singers and reciters, and others were to record what was said by the king.[2] It gradually came to be the preserve of the Bhṛgu *brāhmaṇas* frequently linked to the historical tradition. This transference coincided with a low status for bards in the *dharma-śāstras.*[3] Many *Purāṇas* claim that they were recited by the *sūtas* to the *ṛṣis* in the Naimiṣa forest at the time of the twelve-year *sattra* sacrifice, a claim that is also made for one of the recitations of the *Mahābhārata.*[4] The Naimiṣa forest seems to become a generalized locale for sacrificial rituals.

The *Purāṇas* as texts record the religious beliefs and practices associated with a particular deity. They also reflect the assimilation of other religious forms and beliefs that went into extending the reach of both text and sect.[5] The concept of the *pañcalakṣana* was a departure from the format of the *Vedas* as also was the cosmology of past time periods and the future to come. The *Purāṇas* were serving a different function. They endorsed, at least in theory, the normative behaviour and values conforming to the *dharma-sāstras*, such as in the discussion of the *acāravyavahāra*, relating to the organization and functioning of society. Claims were made to the usual forms of legitimizing a religious text, such as divine revelation, but such claims were hardly necessary for the more mundane sections such as the *vaṃśānucarita* in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. This pertains to the succession and descent of ancient heroes and heads of clans coming down to dynastic succession in the kingdoms. Not every *Purāṇa*, however, included these lists and in the very few that did they were not as systematically arranged as in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* was virtually the only *Purāṇa* that to a large extent conformed to the *pañcalakṣana* format.

Such texts were subject to reformulation as and when necessary.[6] A likely occasion would be when the deity was being given an additional mythology often to introduce new forms of worship frequently in an effort to incorporate new groups into Puranic Hinduism. Inductions such as these could result from the conquest of groups outside the existing caste society where such groups were being incorporated into the social and economic system of the conquerors. They could also result from a process of osmosis, as for example, from the cutting of forests and the settling of land so cleared where erstwhile forest dwellers had to be assimilated. This was a process that could take a few generations as is evident from inscriptional evidence.[7] The propagation of existing religious beliefs and the integration of new ones would require patronage, social sanction, and the interweaving of myths and rituals.

Parallel to what has been called acculturation, and implicit in the perspective of religious sects was the necessity of choosing what was to be included and what excluded. In the formulation of sectarian texts, dedicated to the worship of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and other deities, it is understood that some ideologies would have been excluded and that sometimes the exclusion may have arisen from confrontations. The nature of the *Purāṇa* can perhaps be better understood if there is awareness of its ignoring certain beliefs and practices, although this may be difficult to assess, and to recognizing its hostility to others.

Among the heterodox sects, referred to sometimes as the *pāṣaṇḍas*, the Jainas in particular had their own corpus of *Purāṇas* which served much the same function in focussing on the belief and worship particularly of the *tīrthānkaras*. The Buddhist schools had no specific texts called *Purāṇas*, but some did approximate to the Puranic genre in their projection of the

Buddha such as the *Mahāvastu*. Both the Jainas and the Buddhists are seen as hostile to Puranic Hinduism and perhaps the hostility is greater towards Buddhism, possibly because the competition was more widespread. The absence of a deity in Buddhism may have been problematic although it could have been overcome by treating the Buddha as a virtual deity, similar to the treatment of Mahāvīra in the Jaina *Purāṇas*.

The Jaina tradition intentionally encouraged the writing of texts parallel to some of the existing texts of popular religion from the Brahmanical tradition.[8] The Jaina epic, the *Paumacariyam*, questions by implication the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the narratives of the Jaina *Ādi Purāṇa* counter existing views. The Jaina *Harivaṃśa* is another such example where even the title was retained. Such texts may have to some extent acted as a check on the denigration of the Jainas in the Hindu *Purāṇas*. The Buddhists did not have a recognizably parallel tradition and were in any case at that time stronger contenders for a popular religious support than the Jainas. They were doubtless viewed as greater rivals by the Pauranic authors. The currency of these distinctive *Purāṇas* would have encouraged sectarian loyalties.

The authorship of these various *Purāṇas* differed. The Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva *Purāṇas* are attributed to Vyāsa and his disciples and recur in every age; there have been twenty-eight so far.[9] Some of the Jaina *Purāṇas* are given individual authors. The audience for these texts were largely those who heard them recited, mainly an upper caste, *dvija* audience. Eventually, the more important locations for the recitations of the *Purāṇas* were temples. Given this, patronage—especially royal patronage—for the construction of temples became a matter of intense competition. Royal patronage also took the form of making grants of land, either to the Buddhist *vihāras* or more frequently to learned *brāhmaṇas*. Such grants were used to embellish the *vihāras*. In the case of *brāhmaṇas* if the grant was large enough it could become the base from which a few generations later claims were made to kingship. The mention of the *brahma-kṣatra* as a caste of origin increases in the first millennium AD, and more often applies to *brāhmaṇas* who have taken on *kṣatriya* functions.

I would like to consider the treatment of Buddhism in the *Purāṇas* from a few salient perspectives pertinent perhaps to the intention of the *Purāṇas*: the Buddha as a member of a lineage, the references to his teaching, and statements about those Mauryan rulers listed in the *vaṃśānucarita* section whom the heterodox sects claimed as their patrons. The third of these themes is in the context of the first two as evident from the *Purāṇas*.

In the descent list of the Ikṣvākus after the start of the Kali age, Śākya occurs as the name of a person and not of a clan.[10] Prior to the Kali age Daśaratha and Rāma were listed in the Ikṣvāku lineage. Since this segment begins with the Kaliyuga, the list takes the form of a prediction of those to come and is as follows:

> *... sañjayasya sutoḥ śākyah śākyac śuddhodhano 'bhavat śuddhodanasya bhavitā siddhārtho rāhulah sutaḥ prasenajit tato bhāvyaḥ kṣudrako bhavitā ....*[11]

This translates in a genealogical pattern as:

... Sañjaya
Śuddhodana
Siddhārtha—only in a few *Purāṇas*
Rāhula/Rātula
Praśenajit
Kṣudraka ...

The Ikṣvākus are associated with *kula-vardhanāḥ* (increasing the status of the family) or in alternate readings *śuddha-vaṃśa-jāḥ* (born of a lineage of status). In a couple of *Purāṇas* they are also described as *śūrāś ca kṛta vidyāśca satya-sandhā jitendriyāḥ* (heroes, men of learning, truthful and self-controlled). It is further predicted that three generations down from the last name will see the end of the lineage. As members of the Ikṣvāku lineage they would have claimed being *kṣatriyas*.

Not all the *Purāṇas* include Siddhārtha, and some give alternate names such as Suddhārdha or Śākyārthe.[12] They knew them as Śākyas but do not distinguish between a clan name and a member of the clan. Buddhist texts explain the name Śākya and it is not the name of a person.[13] The *Purāṇas* are not meticulous about any descent list. The contemporary Buddhist sources were consistent about the Buddha's descent but obviously were not consulted. Presumably these narratives of origin from Buddhist sources were regarded as unimportant by the authors of the *Purāṇas* despite the centrality of Buddhism in the period when the earliest *Purāṇas* were being composed. This can perhaps be seen as a comment on how the heterodox sects were viewed by *brāhmaṇa* authors.

The Śākyas were a chiefdom and had no king, as was also the case with some other clans of the time of the Buddha.[14] Given that the *Purāṇas* generally ignored clans that were chiefdoms and therefore ignored many clans contemporary with the Śākyas, such as the Mallas, Koliyas, Vṛjjis, or the Jñātrikas to which Mahāvīra belonged, the latter need not have been included. The reason for this may have been that the Śākyas were said to be descended from Ikṣvāku, the much respected founder of the Śuryavaṃśa. Or, to reverse the argument, was the Buddhist tradition trying to link the Śākyas to Ikṣvāku in order to give them a Śuryvaṃśa lineage? This would also have tied in with their connections to Kosala. Some *Purāṇas* refer to Siddhārtha as the son of Śuddhodana.[15] It is surprising that nothing further is said about him in the genealogical segments since he features in the mythology of evil elsewhere in the *Purāṇas*.

Yet there are some echoes of similarities with Buddhist narratives. The story of the ancestral figure of Okkāka goes through many permutations of legends involving the patriarch banishing his older sons in favour of the son from his younger favourite wife.[16] Like Ikṣvāku, Okkāka is also an ancestor of the Śākyas. It has been suggested that Ikṣvāku could be a Sanskritized form of the Pāli name Okkāka. Ikṣvāku has also been linked to *ikṣa* (sugarcane), in a later Buddhist tradition narrating an origin myth of the Śākyas.[17] He was called Okkāka because when he spoke a light emanated from his mouth.[18] A similar statement is made in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* about Videgha Māthava who is said to have carried Agni in his mouth.[19]

Prasenajit echoes the Pasenadi of the Pāli texts. He was a contemporary of the Buddha, was politically important, and ruled Kosala.[20] He was anxious to have close kinship links with the Śākyas and asked to marry into the Buddha's family. The Śākyans held themselves as being of superior status and therefore sent him a young woman born of a Śākyan and a *dāsī* (female slave). The son from this marriage discovered the fraud and therefore wrecked vengeance on the Śākyas.[21] That the Ikṣvāku dynasty came to a close just a few generations later would be borne out by Buddhist sources which do not mention a long subsequent history.

The section on genealogies and succession lists seems to have no cross-links with those on mythology and religious sects and vice versa. It is almost as if the Siddhārtha of the Ikṣvāku lineage was in no way connected to the Buddha. Were these sections written by different authors whose agendas did not overlap? It is likely that a separation was maintained between succession lists that recorded presumed genealogies of ruling families and statements of religious sectarian opinions. Even if this section of the Ikṣvāku descent list was originally prior to the spread of Buddhism as a religion, it still could have been commented upon from the religious sectarian perspective had there been an integration of various sections of the text. The religious sectarian sections of the *Purāṇas* where the Buddha has an ambiguous role ignore the Śākyas. This is quite apart from genealogies not intended to be taken literally but rather as pawns in a game of status and politics.

It has been suggested that the absence of other *kṣatriya* tribes in the descent lists was because they had been absorbed into caste society or because they were opposed to Puranic Hinduism.[22] Some are given the status of *vrātya kṣatriyas* in Manu.[23] The Licchavis have a high status in Buddhist and Jaina texts being described as *kṣatriyas* of the Vasiṣṭha *gotra*.[24]

As has been pointed out the root *budh* has given rise to various forms.[25] As a noun in the name of the Buddha it occurs in the *Purāṇas* such as, Buddhadeva, Buddharūpa, and so on; and generally in association with an *avatara* of Viṣṇu. In the religious context the Buddha is referred to as the Buddha and generally not as Siddhārtha as in some of the genealogical sections. He is said to have been born in the land of the Kīkaṭas, another name for Magadha in the early sources.[26] Yāska states that the name derives from the inhabitants who reject Vedic sacrifices and this has been glossed as *anārya nivāsa*.[27] He was perceived therefore as socially and culturally different. There is also later a conflation of the Buddha and Mahāvīra when it is said that the Buddha was the son of the Jina, came from Kīkaṭadeśa and was an avatara of Viṣṇu, born to destroy the heretics.[28]

Some later *Purāṇas* made the Buddha into an incarnation of Viṣṇu and left it at that, the assumption being presumably that he and his teaching were thereby incorporated into Vaiṣṇava worship. Hence the occasional description of his being *śānta*, calm, and associated with *yoga*.[29] But clearly this was not acceptable to sectarian Vaiṣṇavas who then constructed a myth to explain why the Buddha had been made into an *avatara* of Viṣṇu despite preaching a doctrine not in conformity with Vaiṣṇava belief. It was maintained that what he taught was opposed to Vedic ritual and therefore the power of those to whom he preached—the *asuras*, *daityas*, and *dānavas*—was weakened and they were defeated in their struggle against the *devas*, those conforming to Vedic *dharma*. In a strongly sectarian manner it is said that the former were diverted from the correct path. Incorporation and exclusion therefore, become parallel processes.

The references to the Buddha as an *avatara* of Viṣṇu were late, dating from the mid-first millennium AD onwards.[30] This was a critical period for the future of both Buddhism and Puranic Hinduism. Judging by Hsüan Tsang's account, Buddhism was declining in parts of *madhya-deśa* and many parts of the peninsula, although not in eastern India. The earlier popularity of Buddhism in the subcontinent had obviously not been forgotten. It was therefore necessary to come to terms with this popularity. In the contestation between the two, the putting down of Buddhism as a popular religion would have been less effective if it had been only a philosophical critique. It was more easily done through associating its teachings with what was regarded as 'the Other' of Indian culture from the perspective of the Brahmanical tradition and by insisting on the incorrectness of its teachings. For this purpose a mythology had to be constructed. The confrontations were with what were regarded as the heresies, the argument being that the presence of *nāstika* doctrines—those opposed to conformity with the Vedic *dharma*—would destroy society.[31]

The Kaliyuga was projected as the age of decline when heresies flourish. The *varṇāśramadharma* was not observed so the essential rules of caste were broken. The *śūdras* were dominant, became kings and performed the *ásvamedha* sacrifice normally only permitted to the twice-born castes. Various evil-minded persons wandered about as mendicants and were maintained through alms.[32] Characteristic of the heretics was their opposition to the *dharma* of the *Vedas*.

The initial incorporation of the Buddha was the story of the Buddha as Māyāmoha. Subsequently he was projected as an *avatara* of Viṣṇu. The context is the deceptive teachings of both Buddhist and Jaina monks. Māyāmoha, with a double emphasis on delusion and illusion is personified as a teacher. The basic story is simple and echoes the primeval myth of the *deva-asura* confrontation. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* narrates the story of *devas*, gods, and *asuras* and *daityas*, demons, at war resulting in the defeat of the *devas*, who appeal to Viṣṇu for help. The appeal is yet another occasion for glorifying Viṣṇu. Neither *devas* nor *asuras* are specifically defined. They seem to be terms used in a broad sense to differentiate between 'us' and 'them'. The *asuras* observe the *varṇa* and recognize religious rites which make them somewhat invulnerable. Yet they are enemies. Therefore, some intervention from a deity is required.[33] Viṣṇu, conceding the appeal of the *devas* produced an illusory form from his body and gave him to the *devas*, saying that this would lead the *asuras* astray; or for that matter even those *devas* who did not observe the Vedic *dharma*.[34] This was Māyāmoha. He went among the *asuras* assembled at the Narmada and was naked, shaven-headed and holding a peacock feather. He was obviously meant to represent a Digambara monk. His teaching of *anekāntavāda* and questioning the Vedic formulae was to divert them from the asceticism required of Vedic practitioners and to attaining *mokṣa*. Nakedness also referred to not being clothed in the *Vedas*.[35] His doctrine spread among the *daityas* and they discarded the *Vedas*.

Māyāmoha then put on some red robes and preached *ahiṃsā* to them, asking them to desist from sacrificing animals. He was thus converted into a Buddhist *bhikkhu*. Under the influence of this teaching the *asuras* gave up their adherence to the Vedic *dharma*. Māyāmoha ensured that a variety of *pāṣaṇḍa* sects, were able to follow his teaching. Many became contemptuous of the *Vedas*, their deities, sacrificial rituals, and the *brāhmaṇas*. They began to pose rational questions that contradicted Brahmanical belief.[36] This has been read as an attempted refutation of the Yogācāra and Śūnyavāda doctrines.[37] The insistence of the heretics on believing only that which can be rationally explained has also been viewed as linked to the question of the divine revelation of the *Vedas*. Ultimately the *asuras* were weakened, which finally led to their defeat by the *devas*.[38]

The concluding section is a diatribe against all *pāṣaṇḍas* where the word has by now changed its meaning from all sects—as used in the Aśokan edicts—to specific sects opposed to Brahmanical doctrines and to Puranic religion. The shift in meaning suggests that the latter may have been large in number. Described as sinners because they contest the *Vedas*, it is said to be a sin to even speak with or be sociable to, such heretics.[39] Frauds, those who have strayed from the path of religious observances and rites, self-serving, wicked, and those given to questioning authority by arguments involving causal reasoning, should be avoided altogether. The attack on causal argument—*hetukaḥ*—was doubtless also directed at philosophical schools such as Sāmkhya and Nyāya. This is a strongly sectarian position on tenets, quite apart from the hostility towards those who are mendicants of the heterodox persuasion, who do not observe the prescribed Brahmanical rituals and who are excluded from the *śrāddhas*.

There are other versions of the story with some changes. The *Matsya Purāṇa* states that Bṛhaspati preached the Jinadharma to the powerful sons of Rāji. When Indra discovered that they were upholding a *dharma* contrary to the *Vedas*, he destroyed them.[40] The moral of the story is that those who deviate from the Vedic *dharma* are *pāṣaṇḍas* and should be avoided. The gods should destroy them. Elsewhere Bṛhaspati in the guise of Śukra preaches to the *asuras* and diverts them from the correct path. The real Śukra curses them but adds that it was their destiny to be diverted.[41] In another variant Bṛhaspati in a sense authors the heretical religion through creating Māyāmoha.[42] Disguised as Sukra he preaches heresy to the *asuras*: that rituals were invented by greedy priests, that deities and *brāhmaṇas* both consume intoxicants and meat, that Śiva and Viṣṇu as deities cannot impart religious doctrines, and so on. The heretics then opposed animal slaughter in rituals and the irrationality of the *Vedas*. Embedded in the mythology is a question raised in a later *Purāṇa*, namely, how could the gods have created a fraudulent teacher? It receives an ambiguous answer: that the gods are prone to human weaknesses.[43]

In some of the later Purāṇas of post-Gupta times the Buddha is projected as an *avatara* of Viṣṇu. Although the background story remains the same, his status as an *avatara* is somewhat different from his being Māyāmoha. As an avatara of Viṣṇu the Buddha can be one of ten or more *avataras*.[44] Viṣṇu took birth as the Buddha or in one text as Siddhārtha, the son of Śuddhodana, and taught the *asuras* to doubt and oppose the *dharma* of the *Vedas*. The *daityas* and *asuras* did so and because of this were weakened and were not only defeated by the *devas* but also ended up in hell.[45] The story comes with eulogies of the various incarnations and the Buddha figures among them, generally the penultimate and prior to Kalkin. The story as narrated is an attempt at assimilating Buddhists. However, when the teachings are referred to, and even more the description of those who teach and accept the teaching, then the acrimony against and the vilification of, the heretical sects is stridently stated.

To read these stories as merely negating the separate identity and continued existence of the heterodox Shramanic sects[46] is to simplify the intention of the *Purāṇas*. They were in essence sectarian texts and aware of the need to confront those regarded as heretical. Shramanic views were recognized as being antithetical to the Vedic. More often than not the litmus test of heresy has to do with acceptance of the Vedic *dharma*. This may have been symbolic not so much of the texts as of the social and ritual mores of Vedic Brahmanism.[47] The definition of the Vedic *dharma* was less focused on the performance of Vedic ritual and more on the observance of *varṇāśramadharma*. The definition of heresy was at one level an objection to the belief and ritual propagated by certain sects. But at another and more emphatic level it was an objection to such sects denying the *varṇa* organization of society and all that this entailed in terms of sacred and social obligations as encoded in the *dharma-śāstras* and *gṛhya-sūtras*.

The use of *māyā* as a prefix is also a comment on Shramanic teaching being ultimately illusory. Even though the *Purāṇas* themselves depart from Vedic views on belief and ritual, they nevertheless continue to endorse the *Vedas*. There were conflicting views even among the authors of the various Purāṇas. It could also be possible that the Shramanic sects were being treated as a front for questioning the Vedic *dharma* by some of its own adherents. The reference to *hetukaḥ* touched on philosophical thought other than that of the heresies.

Inter-sectarian confrontations between Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas are also reflected in some *Purāṇas* but infrequently compared to the opposition to the *śramaṇas* and they tend to be later in date. A general statement is that the presence of *nāstikas*, often identified with *śramaṇas*, destroys a society. The term is used in various senses, from atheists to those who supported other sectarian views. More specifically, the image of *māyāpuruṣa* in the form of a Jaina *muni* is conjured up by Viṣṇu to disturb the rituals of those worshipping Śiva.[48] The *māyāpuruṣa* is told to compose a *śāstra* in *apabrahṃśa*, a language used by some Jaina authors, and the *śāstra* was to counter the *śrutis*, *smṛtis*, and *varṇāśramadharma*. Viṣṇu urges Nārada to persuade Śiva to follow the new doctrine which is clearly a caricature of Buddhism. Such rivalry reflects a competition over patronage and support rather than a refutation of doctrine. In the instances quoted above the intervention of and association with, heretics, symbolizes the rivalry. This is dissimilar to the confrontation between Puranic Hinduism and the Shramanic sects.

Where hostility is expressed against sects such as the Pāśupatas, Vāmacaras, Kapālikas, and Kālamukhas within the Śaiva tradition and the Pañcarātras within Vaiṣṇavas,[49] the hostility seems due less to religious sectarianism and more to their not observing the social norms. This would have been the case with the Pāśupatas and the Kapālikas.[50] Even more curious are the appeals to the Buddha and to Kalkin as incarnations of Viṣṇu for protection against the *pāṣaṇḍas* and the sins of the Kaliyuga.[51] This could be an indicator of the assimilation of Buddhism or else that the character of Buddhism itself had so changed, as in Vajrayāna Buddhism, that it could barely be distinguished from other Puranic sects.

Admittedly, the papering over of differences was more at the level of their popular perception. The *brāhmaṇa* authors of the *Purāṇas* were well aware of diverse sectarian positions that theoretically at least affected belief, ritual, and social practice. These may have started to become interchangeable, requiring adjustments on the part of both *brāhmaṇa* authors and Shramanic teaching.[52] Nevertheless the key issue remained that of who controlled the social norms. Presumably the decline of Buddhism by the early second millennium AD (apart from eastern India) created a confidence among the authors of the *Purāṇas* to induct the Buddha more directly without depicting him as Māyāmoha. As has been pointed out, the *Padma Purāṇa* provides evidence of interpolations. Among the more interesting is when an *ācārya* of the Madhva sect identifies *pāṣaṇḍins* as those who worship Śiva and denounces the *māyāvada* of Sankarācārya as *pracchanna bauddha*, crypto-Buddhism, as indeed did some others as well.[53]

This was also the period of philosophical debates across a large spectrum ranging from the Cārvākas to Vedanta. Critiques of the philosophy of Vedic Brahmanism were common and are summarized together with the views of other schools in texts such as Mādhava's *Sarvadarśana-saṃgraha*. Some argued that the material world was all that existed and others insisted on *ātman* being central.[54] These are important in the context of sectarian competition. Philosophical schools were in a sense implicitly challenging sectarian texts in as much as there was some accommodation of variant views in the former whereas the latter appear to be more rigid. Some overlapping views, however marginal, are present in the Mīmāmsā, Sānkhya, Buddhist, and Cārvāka theories. These philosophical debates are not reflected in Puranic sectarianism. The *Purānas* were intended to propagate the worship of a deity and were not texts concerned with philosophical discourse. Can we argue that there is a suggestion of Viṣṇu also being a crypto-Buddhist, given the manner in which the Buddha as an *avatara* is projected in the *Purāṇas*?

The confrontation between sectarian positions is not a direct one in which arguments may have been raised to denigrate the other sect point by point. The intention here is to declare its teachings incorrect and conducive to evil behaviour. The criterion of correctness is based on observing the Vedic *dharma*, although the Puranic rituals themselves do not observe the *dharma* except in theory. Sometimes this endorsement is weak as in the preference for *tapas* over *yajña* or in statements such as *ahiṃśa* *paramadharmaḥ*.[55] The central deities—Viṣṇu and Śiva—were marginal in the Vedic system and the central deities of the latter—Indra and Agni—are marginal to Puranic Hinduism. The form of worship changed with *yajñas* often being replaced by *pūjā* so that offerings avoided the killing of animals. Icons, unknown to the Vedic system, were now worshipped in temples previously unknown which became permanent sacred spaces. By the end of the first millennium AD temples had become complex institutions funded by grants of land and requiring a hierarchy of administrators and servitors. Cosmologies and mythologies were different as were the ritual requirements of *vratas* and *tīrthas*. Was the insistence on conforming to the Vedic *dharma* largely a front for sectarian conflicts involving issues of social positioning rather than merely belief and ritual?

The belief and practice of Puranic Hinduism was in itself different from the religion of the *Vedas*. It was influenced in many ways by the *śramaṇa* sects although the stance was always one of hostility towards them. The inherent hostility was compared by Patañjali to that of the mongoose and the snake.[56] The projection of the Buddha in the *Purāṇas* is therefore ambiguous. He is not inherently evil but preaches a doctrine that was opposed to the Vedic religion. He is not a *rākṣasa* but is an incarnation of Viṣṇu although this *avatara* has a different function, almost inverting the concept. He does not come into a direct confrontation with the personification of evil who he then annihilates, restoring the world to goodness, as do the other human incarnations of Viṣṇu. There is no one-to-one action as in the case of Narasiṃha, Rāma, and Paraśurāma. The Buddha comes to preach a false doctrine, which because it is false, initially weakens those who are prone to evil and this enables them to be finally defeated. It is a long-term investment requiring a fresh mythology to introduce this change in the concept of an avatara.

The Buddha as Māyāmoha was created from a deity even if he was illusory. This was a reversal of Buddhist belief although it was by now acceptable to many practising Buddhists despite the Buddha as also much of Buddhist philosophy having denied it. In a sense the story of Māyāmoha, possibly a later interpolation,[57] may be a reflection of a historical condition. What had earlier been regarded as heresies were being gradually eroded and being replaced by new heresies in the early second millennium AD. Brahmanical thinking was becoming dominant but not entirely so. The defeat of the *asuras* and *daityas* and the victory of the *devas* could have been an analogy referring to this change in relation to the Shramanic sects.

The Vedic system had to be invoked by the *Purāṇas* largely to endorse the social model of *varṇāśramadharma*, which had its roots in the Vedic system but which was formulated in post-Vedic times. The greatest fear among the authors of the *Purāṇas* concerns the changes in social organization in the Kaliyuga. This is in part a reflection of what was actually happening and in greater part a projection of what could happen once the stringency of the normative rules of caste were questioned. The Kaliyuga was viewed as the time when the caste hierarchy was turned upside down and the *śūdras* were effectively the dominant caste with the *brāhmaṇas* paying respect to them. The Shramanic sects were opposed to the *varṇāśramadharma* and their teaching was not supportive of this system. The matter gets aggravated when kings become patrons of the *pāṣaṇḍas*.[58] This perhaps irked the Puranic authors even more than the differences in belief and ritual.

Given all this, one wonders why the comparatively bland *vaṃśānucarita* section was included, especially in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. It lists the descent of those of high status from earliest times and ends with the kings of various dynasties bringing the information up to the Gupta period. Recorded as a genealogical pattern it is present in only a few *Purāṇas*. Where it is included it seems extraneous. The inclusion of a separate and distinct *vaṃśānucarita* section in the *Purāṇa* was more likely to ensure its preservation as a record embedded in an important religious text as well as to give status to at least the heroes of legend who were accorded the status of *kṣatriyas*.

There appears to be a difference in objectives between those that maintained the *vaṃśānucarita* section and those that composed and edited the other parts of the *Purāṇa*. This is suggested by the absence of negative attributes associated with these rulers who were known to have been, or claimed to have been, followers of the heterodox sects. The reference to the politically powerful early Mauryan emperors is an example.

The dynastic lists subsequent to the lineages of the heroes include the statement that future rulers will be from a variety of castes, including *śūdras* and *mlecchas*.[59] The Mauryas will follow the Nandas. The Nanda dynasty will be founded by Mahapadma, a son of the Śiśunāga king Mahānandin by a *śūdra* woman.[60] Subsequent kings will be *śūdras*. It is not clear whether this applies only to the Nandas or to their successors as well. Mahāpadma will exterminate all the *kṣatriyas*. This in itself would have made it necessary for other *varṇas* to become rulers but the choice of *śūdras* is significant. The uprooting of *kṣatriyas* suggests his having conquered the chiefdoms of the middle Ganga plain in order to establish his *eka-cchattram*, sole sovereignty. The Nandas will be uprooted by the *brāhmaṇa* Kauṭilya who will establish Candragupta of the Mauryas as king. A *brāhmaṇa* would have thought it his duty to uproot *śūdra* kings, but curiously the person he installs is described in other sources as a *vṛṣala*, low caste. Only the Buddhist and Jaina sources give the Mauryas the status of *kṣatriyas*. No comment is made on these deviations from the rules of *varṇa* and presumably, it is expected in the Kaliyuga.

The low status of the Mauryas is asserted in sources other than the Buddhist. In Viśākhadatta's play, *Mudrārākṣasa*, dating to the mid-first millennium AD, Candragupta is referred to variously.[61] He is described as Maurya-*putra*, the suffix *putra* suggesting a clan affiliation. It is also said that he was brought up by a shepherd and that Cānakya recognized his potential and adopted him. Cānakya calls him *vṛṣala* more than once although others refer to him as *āryadeva* and *deva*. Underlying the status of minister and king, it also sets out the superiority of the *brāhmaṇa* over the *śūdra*. The Maurya succession was regarded as important to the Indian past as is evident even in later commentaries in the second millennium AD on texts that refer to the Mauryas, such as the *Mudrārākṣasa*.

Post-canonical Buddhist sources insist on the *kṣatriya* status of the Mauryas and go further and provide them with kinship links to the Śākyas. The region from which they came was full of peacocks (*mayura: mora*), hence the name Moriya/Maurya.[62] This attempted link with the Śākyas gave the Mauryas the appropriate *kṣatriya* status. It also effectively connected the coming of Buddhism to Sri Lanka through Mahinda, the son of Aśoka, with the clan of the Buddha.

A late Jaina tradition held that Candragupta became a Jaina in his last years, abdicated the throne, and travelled together with the Jaina seer Bhadrabāhu to south India.[63] The same text mentions that Candragupta came from a village of peacock-breeders, hence the name Maurya from *mora* and was gifted by his father to Cānakya. Peacock breeders would have been ranked low in the caste hierarchy.

Candragupta's son, Bindusāra is said to have been close to the Ājīvikas. This was not an insignificant sect at this time as is evident from votive inscriptions issued by two Mauryan rulers, Aśoka and Daśaratha, inscribed at the Barabar and Nagarjuni Hill Caves.[64] Contemporary with the writing of the *Purāṇas* there is evidence of what appears to be a Vaiṣṇava attempt to chisel away the name of Ājīvika in three of the inscriptions. The sect is said to have had access to the court of Bindusāra,[65] who had an interest in philosophical ideas since he requested that a sophist be sent to him from Greece.[66] Aśoka's adherence to Buddhism is clear from his edicts.

If the claims of the heterodox sects were correct then the first three and most influential of the Mauryan rulers were all heretics in the eyes of the *brāhmaṇas*. The *Purāṇas* suggest their low *varṇa* status but are silent about their heterodoxy. The one who comes in for flak on both counts in other texts is Aśoka whose patronage gave visibility to the heterodox sects in the Mauryan Empire. It has been thought that the garbling of the name Aśokavardhana in the various *Purāṇas* was meant as disrespect. But names in the *Purāṇas* are known to be garbled merely out of scribal error. Little is said about him in the *Purāṇas* but there are many snide remarks on his name, *devānampiya* (the beloved of the gods), in other texts.[67] The discussion among grammarians about the use of this word is a sharp attack, even if indirect, on Aśoka.

It is interesting that the word was initially used as an honorific. It is used thus later by the grandson of Aśoka, Daśaratha in one of his inscriptions.[68] Patañjali treats it as such.[69] The *Mahāvaṃsa* composed in the sixth century AD, claims that the Sri Lankan ruler Tissa, also used it as a title, associating it with Aśoka.[70] By the AD eleventh century the term had come to acquire the derogatory and sarcastic meaning of one who is foolish or ignorant—*mūrkha*, as is stated by Kaiyaṭa.[71] Aśoka had not been erased from people's memory since he is known to Kalhaṇa and written about in the *Rājataraṅginī*.[72] He is described as a supporter of the *Jina-śāsana* who built many *vihāras* and *caityas* and was reckoned as a praiseworthy king. This contradicts the Puranic presentation of the Shramanic religions or even the definition of *devānampiya* by contemporary grammarians. As a royal title, *devānampiya* had been replaced by the more high-sounding *mahārājādhirāja* and other similar titles in the early first millennium AD. The change in the meaning of *devānampiya* in Brahmanical sources doubtless had to do with their sectarian confrontation with Buddhism and their view of Aśoka's connection to Buddhism. The silence of the *Purāṇas* about Aśoka is all the more striking since Buddhist sources of the time were highlighting Aśoka as a sectarian hero. He is said to have killed eighteen thousand Ājīvikas and burnt alive Nirgrantha *upāsakas* and offered a gold coin for the head of each Jaina monk.[73] An assertion of difference with if not hostility towards, *brāhmaṇas*, is evident in the terms used by Buddhist authors such as, *brahmanajātiyapāsaṇḍa* (brāhmaṇas who taught false doctrine) and *brahmane brahmapakkhike*.[74]

Whereas heretics in general are vilified, kings known to be personally committed to heretical sects are not condemned where they are mentioned by name in the Puranic dynastic lists. The politics of royal patronage where kings were patrons of Brahmanical and Shramaṇic sects is evident from the time of Aśoka who calls for both *brāhmaṇas* and *śramaṇas* being respected. There appears to be a deliberate intention to keep the dynastic lists free from comment as far as religious patronage was concerned, although caste status is clearly referred to. The *vaṃśānucarita* is punctuated by narratives of early heroes. Such narratives are absent in the dynastic section. Yet so much could have been made out of the Buddhist projection of the wicked Aśoka, Caṇḍasoka, prior to his 'conversion' and his becoming Dhammasoka.

Measured by archaeological remains Aśoka's patronage to Buddhism was extensive. It has been suggested that some aspects of the *Māhābhārata* in particular were a response to or an attempt to whittle down the influence of this patronage.[75] It is even described as a Brahmanical manifesto provoked by the imperium of Aśoka.[76] Aśoka was not only having *stūpas* and *caityas* constructed but was cutting at the roots of the Vedic *dharma*. His edicts do not mention *varṇa* or *jāti*, his insistence on *ahiṃsā* was inimical to animal sacrifice, he was averse to various rituals and ceremonies and made a rather sceptical use of the gods to propagate his notion of *dhamma*. He was doing what was expected of a Māyāmoha. It would have been normal for Brahmanical sectarian texts to target him.

The Buddha *avatara* of Viṣṇu presents something of a paradox in Puranic sources. This is apparent in the nature of how he is depicted.[77] Viṣṇu creates the Buddha to harm 'the Other' through conversion to heresy, but then is incarnated as Kalkin in order to destroy the heretics. The way in which Māyāmoha functions contradicts the *bodhisattva* and the *arhat* ideal, which presumably it was intended to do. The Buddha *avatara* was perhaps an attempt to appropriate heresy even though overtly decrying it. It is interesting that the Buddhists did not object to such an appropriation. The Vaiṣṇavas tended not to directly confront what was regarded as heresy as did the Śaivas. Episodes of Śaiva–Buddhist and Śaiva–Jaina conflict are referred to from the mid-first millennium onwards.[78] There are fewer instances of such conflicts between the Vaiṣṇavas and the heterodox sects. Was heresy in some ways sublimated in the story of the Buddha *avatara* of

Viṣṇu? Vaiṣṇava–Śaiva confrontations might have taken precedence over the confrontation between Brahmanical thinking and heresy. The same argument of false doctrine is used by Madhvā against Śaivism and against Śankarācārya.[79]

The Buddha *avatara* possibly introduces a change in the concept of incarnation and of evil. The Buddha as Māyāmoha is not Viṣṇu reborn as a man but is created by Viṣṇu from himself. Evil is not that which is associated with individual behaviour and actions but with sectarian beliefs and the ordering of society. Much importance is given to the centrality of argument and logic among those opposed to the *Vedas* detracting the virtuous—*hetuvādavimohitaḥ*. The Buddha *avatara* as a protector together with Kalkin reflects a decrease in the prevalence of Shramanic heresy. To that extent it records a change in the relationship between the Shramanic sects and Puranic Hinduism. The experience of this heresy prepares the scene for heresies within the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava tradition. It could be argued that the Buddha *avatara*, although it precedes Kalkin is to some degree, a consequence of the need for Kalkin, since heretics have to be created in order that they may be destroyed. This is also not unconnected with the increasing significance of Maitreya in the Buddhism of the early first millennium AD, parallel to the saviour-figure cults of the eastern Mediterranean.[80] There is a problem however, in co-relating the dimension of time as given in the theory of the *yugas* with these sentiments. If the Buddha precedes Kalkin fairly closely, then he has to be dated in the last phase of the Kaliyuga, far further into the future than is permitted by the dating of the Kaliyuga in human years. Even if it is assumed that at the time of the composition of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* this stage of the Kaliyuga had arrived, it would be contradicted by the linear dating of the Kaliyuga as given for instance in the Aihole inscription of Pulakesin II. This dates the start of the Kaliyuga to 3102 BC but the total length of the Kaliyuga was calculated as 432,000 years.[81] Chronology was of little consequence in narrating these sectarian hostilities.

The richness of the contentions over belief, ritual, and social ordering in other sections of the *Purāṇa* is a contrast to the pared down statements of projections of political power in the *vaṃśānucarita*. That lists of dynastic succession lack a commentary on those listed is perhaps a statement that rulership was perceived as distinct from the sectarian identity of the ruler. The prestige of kingship over other forms of polities was established by the mid-first millennium AD as is also evident from the focus on dynasties as part of the *vaṃśānucarita*. The brāhmaṇa endorsement of kingship is also evident from a variety of other texts. The *śūdra* status of the Mauryan emperors meant that they were not conforming to the *varṇāśramadharma* central to Vedic *dharma*. Even if not adhered to in many other texts, this distinction would also have made it possible for rulers to be patrons of more than one sect, as most had to be.

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Notes and References

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1. These were hymns, hero-lauds, and narratives about heroes. *Itihāsa* literally means 'thus indeed it was' and *purāṇa* refers to legends and traditions.
2. *Padma Purāṇa*, 2.28.88.
3. In the *Vedas*, the *sūta* is described as *ahantiya* (*Atharvaveda* 3.5.7; *Taittirīya Saṃhita* 4.5.2) whereas in Manu (10. 11, 26) he is of a low caste. *Māhābhārata*, Ādiparvan, 122.4ff.; 126. 15; *Bhagavata Purāṇa*, 10. 23–32.
4. For instance, *Matsya Purāṇa*, 1.5ff.
5. For a recent study of this aspect, see Vijay Nath, *Puranas and Acculturation* (Delhi: 2001); W. Doniger (ed.), *Purana Perennis, Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts* (Albany: 1993); K. Chakrabarti, *Religious Process, The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition* (Delhi, 2001).
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9. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.3.11ff.; cf. 6.15ff.
10. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV. 22. 1.ff.
11. F.E. Pargiter, *The Purana Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age* (Delhi: 1975) (reprint), pp. 9–12.
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13. *Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī*, 1.258.
14. *Majjhima Nikāya*, I. 457; I. 228; *Dīgha Nikāya*, I.91; II.164.
15. *Agni Purāṇa*, 16.2.; *Matsya Purāṇa*, 271.12.
16. *Dīgha Nikāya*, 1.92; *Mahāvastu*, 1.348; *Mahāvaṃsa*, 2.12–16; *Dīpavaṃsa*, 3.41–45.
17. S. Beal, *Romantic History of Buddha* (London: 1907), 18ff.
18. *Sumaṇgala-vilāsinī*, 1.258.
19. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.4.1.14–19.
20. *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha*, 1.338.
21. *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha*, 1.339ff.; *Jātaka*, 4.144 no. 465.
22. Vijay Nath, *Puranas and Acculturation* (Delhi: 2001), pp. 38–42.
23. Manu 10.22.
24. B.C. Law, *Tribes in Ancient India* (Poona: 1973), second edition, p. 302.
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26. *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, 1.1.32; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 1.3.24.
27. *Nirukta*, 6.32.
28. *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, 1.1.32; 86.11; 196.11.
29. *Agni Purāṇa*, 49.8; *Śiva Purāṇa*, II. 15.16.11, quoted in Bhattacharya, 1982.
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33. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.17.37–39.
34. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.17.41–44.
35. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.18.35ff.
36. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.18.24.
37. Dandekar, 'Heretical Doctrines'.
38. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, III, 17–18; *Devibhāgavata Purāṇa*, 4.13.
39. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.18.99ff.
40. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 24. 37–49.
41. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 47. 182–228.
42. *Padma Purāṇa*, Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa 13, quoted in Dandekar.
43. *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, 4.12–14, quoted in Dandekar.
44. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 47.247; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 1.3.24, 6.8.19, 10.40.22.
45. *Agni Purāṇa*, 16.2.
46. Nath, *Puranas and Acculturation*, p. 21.
47. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 3.18.35ff.
48. *Liṅga Purāṇa*, 71, quoted in Dandekar.

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55. *Matsya Purāṇa*, 143.13; 143.40–41; 148.32.
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60. Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age*, 25.
61. Act II.6; Act VII.12.
62. *Vaṃsatthapakāsinī*, I, 5, 179–80.
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66. Athenaeus, III, 444.
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10

Exile and the Kingdom

Some Thoughts on the 'Rāmāyaṇa'*

It is now recognised that epic literature is composed of many layers of consciousness, some of which layers recede into the sub-conscious. It is this which allows a versatility in the interpretation of epic material. Historians working on the Indian epics have largely concentrated on the virtually impossible task of dating the epics, trying to authenticate the events or using fragments as source material on a variety of subjects.[1] There have been few attempts to analyse in a historical context the variations within the theme of the individual epic. Obviously this is more manageable with the *Rāmāyaṇa* which has a relative unity of theme than with the *Mahābhārata*.

The epic form in some ways simulates historical writing. In the same way as the historian reflects on the past and seeks to crystallise events of earlier time into a comprehensible pattern, the epic poet is also reflecting on past times from the perspective of contemporary events. The idiom therefore is of the new times with a nostalgia for the old.

As a formal composition the epic draws into itself the poetry of past ages through many levels of cultural experience: mythical, legendary, sometimes historical and also contemporary, with fictional details supplied by its final redactor. Through the many redactions some levels recede into the sub-conscious and later explanations differ from original intentions. Irrespective of when it is written down the epic derives its elaborate metrical style and diction from oral recitation at ceremonial and social assemblies. The relation of epic poetry to its heroic age is not to be found in the observance of any strict historical fact.[2] It lies rather in the epic capacity for bringing together all manner of lively passages from the general experience of the age in a story about famous characters.

There is a recognisable format in epic literature which grows out of the narrative of the folk-tale. Every major episode as the connecting link in the action can be seen as a recognisable structure.[3] Epic language has its own peculiarities. These have been ascribed to various factors—that they are archaisms of earlier forms or new formations in a changing language or that grammatical irregularities are dialectical variations of expressions of popular idioms.[4] The lack of uniformity is often due to the fragments of poetry, ballad, folk-tale coming from a variety of sources and in spite of the best efforts of the epic poet the natural flavour of the fragments remains. The characteristics of epic form are however unmistakable; descriptions both short and long are frequently stereotypes, although the stereotype emerges within the particular epic;[5] descriptions of the ideal king, hero, lover are equally uniform.[6] The repetition of events[7] is also suggestive of epic style as indeed the repetition of stock phrases as techniques of simple versification.[8] All these epic elements can be easily spotted in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The epic elements are nevertheless encased in a more polished literary style, that of the *kāvya*. Evidently Vālmīki had brought together a large body of oral literature of various kinds and refashioned it as a *kāvya*.[9] The fragments can also be recognised in a variety of other sources. The range of these makes it virtually impossible to give a precise date to the epic. What is perhaps more significant than the chronology is the selection of episodes which are carried forward from generation to generation as an essential part of a cultural ensemble. The *Rāmāyaṇa* reappears throughout Indian history in a number of translations and adaptations. For this reason a useful working distinction would be to refer to the core-story as the *Rāma-kathā* and the more embroidered versions as the various *Rāmāyaṇas*, as is partially suggested by Bulcke in his study, *Rāma-kathā*.

For the historian both the continuity of the *Rāma-kathā* and its metamorphoses are matters of some consequence. Questions stemming from this are but a small part of the totality of those which have already been asked, yet for the historian they are significant. No doubt the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* can be seen as largely mythical in some of its references, as for example, to the inhabitants of the forest, but the mythology is based on certain assumptions and it is with these that the historian is primarily concerned. Whether the *vānaras* were humans with a monkey totem or entirely the creatures of Vālmīki's imagination is not so important a question as the defining of what they symbolise. For the poet, the theologian or the historian the *Rāmāyaṇa* represents different facets of the tradition. The historian sees it as a core with kaleidoscopic variations and is concerned with the nature of these variations and their purpose. The multiple forms of the *Rāma-kathā* reflect changing historical situations and at the same time, are in themselves an index to the change. I would like in this lecture to comment on the continuity and change in the *Rāma-kathā* in its historical context and with reference to some of the versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the early period of north Indian history.

It has long been maintained that the earliest *kāvya* version, the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, consisted originally only of the portions now included in Books II to VI, and that the first and seventh books are later additions.[10] The variations in the recensions would indicate a long oral transmission and this would allow for the interpolation of many episodes, some of which, such as the reference to the signet ring, as it has quite rightly been argued,[11] could be fairly late. There is a plethora of myths and legends included in the Bālakāṇḍa which were current favourites in the *Purāṇas* of the first millennium AD.[12] The weaving in of these legends could be explained by arguing that they were linked to the personalities belonging to the Ikṣvāku or Sūryavamśa lineage. It is of course an open question whether the inclusion of the genealogies in the Bāla-kāṇḍa was not also a later borrowing from Purānic descent lists. The Uttara-kāṇḍa is an unexpected excursus on the lineage of Rāvaṇa with an explanation of his role in the epic as well as on the lineage of Hanumān, both of which curiously come after the conclusion of the events. Here too there is a scatter of stories familiar from other texts of a later period which are incorporated as myths of explanation. Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of both the Bāla-kāṇḍa and the Uttara-kāṇḍa is the emphasis on Rāma being an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

The structure of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki as it now exists is by no means a simple, unified whole. It is replete with interlocking stories and semi-independent episodes. The introduction of Viśvamitra and the stories narrating his elevation from *rājarṣi to brahmarṣi* assume greater significance in the light of Viśvamitra and Rāvaṇa (both descended from Prajāpati) being polar images, the one involving the transposition from *kṣatriya* to *brāhmana* the other moving from *tapas* to *yuddha*.[13] Another sub-plot relates to the role of Sītā both as the motivator of action at crucial points in the story as well as indicating the rise and decline of a fertility goddess. The sub-plots span the various sections of the text, yet each of the *kāṇḍas* has its own pivot of action, where the central episode is often self-contained and traceable to separate traditions of the folktale.

The highpoint of the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa is the intrigue of the beautiful Kekeyī, and the banishment of her step-son the legitimate heir—a story well-known to many folk traditions. It occurs in Buddhist literature for example in association with the aged emperor Aśoka, where similarly, because of the stratagem of a young wife his son, Kunāla had to be exiled.[14] The explanation of the promise in the case of Daśaratha is clarified through another episode, known again to the Buddhist tradition, relating to the curse of Śravana. The central episode of the Āraṇya-kāṇḍa is the kidnapping of Sītā by Rāvaṇa. The kidnapping of princesses by *rākṣasas* was not unknown to the history of the middle Ganges plain and many instances are quoted as for example, in the early history of Vaiśāli.[15] Such princesses were either rescued and remarried to their rescuers or allowed to live with their *rākṣasa* husbands. The descriptions of the *āśramas* and the attempts of various animals to help Sītā are incidental to the main action. The Sugrīva-Vālin episode in the Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa serves to introduce Hanumān to Rāma, although more effectively it introduces the subplot of the Hanumān story. The killing of Vālin remains without adequate explanation. The Hanumān sub-plot continues into the Sundara-kāṇḍa with its background of Rāvaṇa's Lankā. The high drama of the conflict in the Yuddha-kāṇḍa puts all else into the shade and the battle between the forces of Rāma and Rāvaṇa provide ample occasions for the interpolations of lesser legends.

It is not merely in such echoes of folktales that one suspects that a number of stories were skilfully woven together in the making of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The authorship and the original recitation of the text are, to say the least, puzzling. As has been pointed out the compound phrase used for the two sons of Sītā, Kuśilavau, literally refers to bards or actors or rhapsodists (*kāvyopajivinho*).[16] The *Rāmāyaṇa* composed by Vālmīki is said to have been taught to Kuśa and Lava who recite it to their father.[17] They are princes of the royal blood and not professional bards and this seems to have been an unlikely action on their part. In fact the Jaina version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts them as going to war against their father to avenge the wrong done to their mother, an act more in keeping with heroic values. Vālmīki is consistently said to be of low origin. This would not be out of keeping with the generally low status to which bards were relegated in the course of time.[18] But he was elevated to Bhārgava status when the Bhṛgus decided to change the function of the epic. The identification of Rāma with Viṣṇu belongs to a later period when Vaiṣṇava incarnations were systematised and the *Rāmāyaṇa* was transformed from *kāvya* into a sacred text, through substantial interpolations identifying Rāma with Viṣṇu.

It has been argued that there are two stories in the *Rāmāyaṇa*[19] one is that of the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa with Daśaratha as the main character and this may be historical; the other is the Rāvaṇa episode representing a version of the stereotype conflict between *devas* and *asuras*. Without forcing the narrative it does suggest that the focus is on two episodes—the kingdom of Ayodhyā and the events enacted there and the exile of Rāma and the events during the exile. The kingdom and the exile therefore, as themes, appear to be the two main pivots of the story. They also lend themselves to two contrastive societies and to two contrary images, thus, enhancing both the historical and symbolic texture of the story.

An analysis of the different *Rāmāyaṇas* and the degree to which they incorporate the *Rāma-kathā* has its own interest. In the Buddhist tradition which was probably the closest contemporary tradition to that of Vālmīki,[20] the *Rāma-kathā* occurs fragmented in various *Jātaka* stories.[21] The events of the kingdom are the principal features in the *Daśaratha Jātaka* with the Śravana story told in the *Sāma Jātaka*. Exile is the focus of the *Vessantara Jātaka* and the *Sambulā*, *Nalinikā* and *Jayaddisa Jātakas* and also of the *Anāmaka Jātaka* of the Chinese tradition. The Khotanese version also emphasises the exile episode. The *Paumacariyam* follows the Vālmīki version by combining both episodes although some of the details are different. This is also broadly true of the *Mahābhārata* versions of the *Rāma-kathā* as well as those in the various *Purāṇas*. It may be suggested therefore that the two pivotal stories existed separately in the earlier tradition and were probably first put together in a single text to become the standard version of the *Rāma-kathā* and converted to the *kāvya Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki from which later versions were derived. Similarities may have arisen from a floating epic tradition which was available to any poet. The dissimilarities need to be examined more closely.

The *Daśaratha Jātaka* focuses on the events relating to the kingdom. The story is told within a structure which is consistent with Buddhist origin myths but noticeably different from the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Daśaratha was the king of Banaras. His eldest queen bore him two sons, Rama-paṇḍita and Lakkhana and a daughter, Sītā-Devī. On the death of this queen a younger queen was raised to the status of queen consort and the latter insisted that her son Bharata be declared heir-apparent. The king fearful for the lives of the two elder sons, advised them to go into exile for twelve years and suggested that Rāma-paṇḍita claim the throne on the death of his father. Sītā joined her brothers in exile and they all went to the Himalaya. The king died after nine years and Bharata came in search of Rāma. Lakkhana and Sītā on hearing of their father's death fainted, but Rāma revived them and preached to them on death and the impermanence of life. Rāma refused to return until the completion of the twelve years and instead gave his sandals to Bharata to guide him in taking decisions. Finally Rāma returned, Sītā became his queen consort and he ruled for sixteen thousand years.

The story follows fairly closely in outline the origin myths of the major segments of the Ikṣvāku lineages involved in the rise of Buddhism, such as the Koliyas, the Śākyas and the Licchavis.[22] It is generally the king of Kāśi[23] who banishes his children and they settle in the Himalaya thus moving to the north and not the south. The theme of the step-mother being involved in the exile of the children is not uncommon. The rule of the brother and sister is the point at which the genealogies start and this action therefore has a genealogical importance symbolising purity of lineage. Usually the story continues with sixteen pairs of twins followed by a series of cross-cousin marriages. The number sixteen—2^4 or 4^2—was clearly regarded as magical. The length of reign for Rāma echoes the *rāma-rājya*, the Utopia, from other traditions. In the context of *kṣatriya* chiefships prior to the change to monarchical states, these events would not have been incongruous.

The *Vessantara Jātaka* describes the exile in the forest of Vessantara and his family. In the *Jayyadisa Jātaka* Rāma is exiled to the Daṇḍaka forest and not to the Himalayas. The exile theme is common to many other *Jātakas* and often the banished person turns out to be a *bodhisattva* as in the *Sāma* and *Nalinikā Jātakas*. The theme of exile, so common to the origin myths of the *kṣatriya* tribes as given in Buddhist literature, appears to symbolise the branching off of junior lineages from the main tribe through migration and the search for new lands to be brought under cultivation. In the origin myths exile is permanent and the place of exile becomes the nucleus of a new *janapada* with its own city. Exile therefore characterises pioneering activity at new frontiers. Exile in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not permanent since Rāma returns to Ayodhyā. Yet his son Kuśa establishes a separate kingdom in the area of his father's exile and rules from Kuśasthali.[24] The differentiation between Uttara Kosala and Dakṣina Kosala is also significant, in that the theme of exile in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is closely related geographically with the latter area.[25] This is not to suggest that Dakṣina Kosala was established as a result of the defeat of Rāvaṇa, but rather that the story was used to reinforce the links between Uttara and Dakṣina Kosala which links may have been sought at a later period. The association of a story with a geographical location does not necessarily coincide with the events or the period of the original story. Epic literature, often characterised by interpolations, can have its geographical horizon extended with the incorporation of new material. Similarly when a culture is established in a new area, geographical place-names whether fresh or changed often reflect a connection with the new culture. Thus it is quite feasible to suggest that with new recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, local geography or at least the expanded information on geography encroached upon the new edition. The inclusion of the geography of the peninsula or for that matter even the subcontinent need not indicate the actual area of the exile of Rāma but could reflect the expanded horizons of the later additions to the story.

The *Sambula Jātaka* parallels the Sītā sub-plot of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. A prince suffering from leprosy exiles himself and his wife accompanies him. She is kidnapped by a demon but saved by Indra and restored to her husband. As a test of her faithfulness she cures him of leprosy and they return to his kingdom. But he continues to be suspicious of her. Finally his father rebukes him and helps in the reconciliation between husband and wife. The *Anāmaka Jātaka* available from a Chinese translation comes closest to the Rāvaṇa episode. A prince threatened by his maternal uncle goes into exile accompanied by his wife. She is kidnapped by a Nāga. The prince, assisted by a large bird and some monkeys, builds a bridge to the island where the princess is imprisoned and rescues her. She has to undergo a fire ordeal to prove her chastity. It is curious that this story is treated as complete in itself and no mention is made of the Ikṣvāku lineage or the Daśaratha episode.

That the Buddhist tradition would incorporate stories about the Ikṣvāku lineage is not surprising since the prominent *kṣatriya* tribes associated with Buddhism claimed to be Ikṣvākus.[26] The most detailed genealogies for the Ikṣvākus are available in the *Purāṇas*.[27] They differ from those in the *Rāmāyaṇa*[28] in that they are fuller and the arrangement of names is not identical. However it is possible that the descent lists mentioned in the Bāla-kāṇḍa were worked out with the prior knowledge of the lists in the early *Purāṇas*. We are told in the Purāṇic genealogies that after the antediluvian Manus, the seventh Manu Svayambhu had ten sons of whom the eldest was Ikṣvāku[29] and his descendants constitute the Sūryavamśa lineage. Two of Ikṣvāku's sons were Vikukṣi who founded what later came to be known as the Ayodhyā lineage and Nimi who founded the Videha lineage.[30] These two could have been tribal subdivisions or exogamous phratries in which case the reference to Rāma and Sītā as brother and sister could well be a symbolic reference to phratry relations and not to a blood relationship. Stories of sibling unions are common to both patrilineal and matrilineal systems. The purpose is in part to highlight and prolong the relationship between kin groups established by marriage. It is also an explanation of origins.[31] The Buddhist tradition then seems to refer back to an early tribal context earlier than the version of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. The repudiation of Sītā might denote the repudiation of her phratry or the decline of Videha.

Videha after the events referred to in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in Brahmanical sources diminishes in significance, although from later history it is clear that it maintains a core of Brahmanical orthodoxy. Buddhist sources speak of the Videhas as one of the confederate clans of the Vajji oligarchy of tribal chiefships which rose to power at Vaiśāli and of which the Licchavis were the most powerful members. It is recognised as being an ancient land, once a monarchy and later a *gaṇa-sangha*, a tribal oligarchy or tribal chiefship. Mithilā retained some of its importance as the Buddha is said to have preached there. It was known to be a trade centre with links as far as Gandhāra.[32] Kosala continued to dominate the Ganges plain, competed in power with the other major states and finally succumbed to Magadha after the death of Praśenajit. It is curious that nowhere in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, even as later interpolations, is there any mention of the *gaṇa-saṅgha* system which flourished in the environs of Kosala if not in Kosala itself. Evidently only monarchy had political sanction from the author and the redactors. A collation of the genealogy from the *Purāṇas* takes the descent of the lineage from Lava (ruling at Śrāvasti) down to Praśenajit and Viḍuḍbha.[33]

A characteristic of the Ikṣvāku lineage in Purāṇic sources is that succession to kingship, both in Ayodhyā and Videha, went always to the eldest son. Primogeniture indicates a society where land rights have been established. Where there might have been a variant descent and inheritance system an additional emphasis on patrimonial primogeniture is required. The emphasis might also suggest that it was practised by an elite group to distinguish itself from lesser groups in the same society. The sibling unions in certain versions of the *Rāma-kathā* may point to a different social system which changed to patrilineal primogeniture and this was being underlined in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. The break from tradition therefore as proposed by Kekeyī was a traumatic event as it not only precluded the heir apparent from succession but was contrary to the accepted norm. The recording of primogeniture among the Sūryavamśa contrasts with the pattern of the Candravamśa or Aila lineages where the distribution and expansion of the junior lineages is also recorded.[34] The listing of all the segments is as essential to the Candravamśa as it is absent in the Sūryavamśa. This could point to the portrayal at least, of a more developed state system among the Sūryavamśa.

Most of the *Purāṇas* echo a selection of events from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the selection varying in each text but not substantially.[35] Some *Purāṇas* such as the *Skanda Purāṇa* refer to places associated with these events.[36] The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* abbreviates the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the genealogical section on the Ikṣvākus.[37] Prominence is given to the Ahalyā story, the breaking of the bow, the Rāma–Paraśurāma conflict, the banishment, the Sugrīva-Vālin episode and most of the events of the Yuddha-kāṇḍa. There are two distinct sections to the story representing the events in the kingdom and during the exile, but in this version the story is drawn together through the projection of the Rāmavatāra of Viṣṇu. It therefore agrees with the Rāmopakhyānā version in the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Mahābhārata* often refers to the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by way of parallels or to illustrate a point. Evidently the *Rāma-kathā* was familiar to its audiences. On two occasions it is brought in as part of the *ṣoḍaśarājopākhyāna*, the recitation of the great deeds of sixteen kings of the past of which Rāma is one.[38] This consists of set verses which probably originated in earlier bardic fragments and where literary similarities with the *Ramāyaṇā* could derive from a common source. It is not a summary of the *Rātnāyaṇa* as the episodes are arranged differently.[39] It is likely that the Vālmīki *Ramāyāṇa* was known to later editors of the *Mahābhārata* which would account for some of the parallels in the two texts.[40]

The Ramopākhyāna surprisingly begins with a description of the *rākṣasas* and in particular the greatness of Rāvaṇa and the fact of his being the grandson of Prajāpati. There is much on the sheer magnificence of Lankā and its wealth. Rāvaṇa acquired power through *tapas* and so pleased the gods that even Brahmā bestowed boons on him. But his arrogance became intolerable and ultimately Brahmā had to arrange for his destruction with the aid of Viṣṇu who took the form of Rāma. The events of the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa are telescoped and details relate to the story of the exile. There is no *agni-parīkṣā* since the gods testify to Sītā's chastity, and this is possibly a late interpolation. The conflict between Rāma and Rāvana is the central episode in this version and what is noticeable is that the two do not typify a simplistic view of extreme good and evil. There are many subtleties in the depiction of Rāvaṇa. The story is interspersed sometimes with the gory details of the slaughtering of thousands of *rākṣasas* armed with supernatural weapons and sometimes with charming vignettes such as the Icarus-like fable of Jatāyu and Sampati. The return to Ayodhyā sees the performance of ten *aśvamedhas* and the trebling of the gifts to the *brāhmaṇas*. The triumph of the hero is also the triumph of the deity.

Clearly, Bhāgavata values had by now been infused into the *Rāma-kathā* if not the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself, probably by the Bhṛgus.[41] The rise of Bhāgavatism was expressed in the worship of Viṣṇu and an emphasis on *bhakti*. It encouraged universalism and was capable of drawing together divergent groups in allowing considerable scope for the inter-play of cultures, as is evident from the forms of assimilation and acculturation experienced by the Vaiṣṇava cult. The conversion of hero to deity made those familiar with the epic sympathetic to the deity and those who identified with the culture of the hero would tend to identify with the new religious cult.

The conversion of the epic into a sacred text is reflected indirectly in yet another version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which consciously sets out to be the mirror image of the Vālmīki text in its Bhṛguised form.[42] The *Paumacariyam* (*Padmacaritam*) of Vimalasūri states at the start that king Śrenika (Bimbisāra) was doubtful about the authenticity of the existing versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and ordered the composition of an authentic version[43] which the text of Vimalasūri purports to be. The *Paumacariyam* among the initial Jaina versions of the *Rāma-kathā* was composed in the early centuries AD and was very influential in projecting the Jaina interpretation of the story.[44] It is interesting that the debate on the authenticity of the existing *Rāmāyaṇa* is pushed back to the time of Bimbisāra. This could be a pointer to the date of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or an attempt to give antiquity to the *Paumacariyam*.

The geographical location of Vimalasūri's text is in the main the Vindhyan region particularly the Narmada and Tapti valleys including western India and to the north of the Godavari river.[45] The format of the text resembles a *purāṇa* rather than an epic as it begins with cosmology and creation, continues with the biographies of the *tīrthaṅkaras*, the establishment of the social orders and finally the genealogies of the families involved, especially the Ikṣvākus and the Vidyādharas (the lineages of the *rākṣasas* and *vānaras*). The story starts in the Vindhyas and focuses on Rāvaṇa and then moves to Ayodhyā and the north. The *Paumacariyam* is probably the only major version in which Sītā is actually the daughter of Janaka.[46] But at the same time she is twin sister to Bhāmaṇḍala who later wishes to marry her but desists when he discovers the relationship. The hint of incest is reminiscent of the *Daśaratha Jātaka*. However Janaka and Daśaratha do not belong to the same lineage. Janaka hails from Campānagara in Aṅga, a place often associated with events of importance in the Jaina tradition. The explanation of Daśaratha's boon to Kekeyī and the exile of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sīta differs from that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The period of exile is spent in helping local kings re-establish their power and requiring them to construct Jaina shrines since Rāma is a zealous Jaina. If the Jaina context is made evident so is the absence of Brahmanical rituals and ceremonies. The story of the kidnapping of Sītā, the assistance given by Hanumān and the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa broadly follows the *Rāmāyaṇa* but again differs in details. Rāvaṇa is often described as meditating in a Jaina shrine and is generally a far more human and attractive personality than in the Vālmīki version. He shows compassion for the suffering Sītā, realises that she can never reciprocate his feelings, considers returning her to Rāma, but determines to defeat him in battle before doing so. Sītā's *agni-parikṣā* takes place after her sons have grown to manhood and have reproached their father for his treatment of Sītā. Finally Sītā renounces the world and becomes a nun and Rāma an ascetic, in conformity with Jaina ideals.

A large part of the *Paumacariyam* focuses on Rāvaṇa and the events which occur during the exile. The doubtful authenticity refers among other things to the character attributed to the *rākṣasas* in other versions. The ogre-like descriptions of the *rākṣasas* are absent and they are depicted as humans. It is specifically said that they are not demons and that their name derives from the word meaning protection.[47] The simian nature of the dwellers of Kiṣkindhā is rightly scoffed at. The Vānaravamśa is said to have been started by a member of the Vidyādhara lineage who established himself in Kiṣkindhā and took the monkey standard as his emblem—an eminently rational explanation.

The genealogies of the Ikṣvāku are closer to the Purāṇic sources. The Ikṣvāku line begins with Ādityayaśa (and the Ādityavamśa) who is the son of Bharata and the grandson of Ṛṣabha, the first *tirthaṅkara*. The listing of the Vidyādhara-vamśa also descended from Ṛṣabha includes a large number of what might be spurious names, the repetition of the same prefix in group after group making the list somewhat suspect.[48] This is a method often resorted to by genealogists who have to fill a time-gap. The Rākṣasa-vamśa is a branch of the Vidyādhara and is based at Lankā-puri. The Vānara-vamśa is also described as a branch of the Vidyādhara. Rāvaṇa's wife Śriprabhā is from the Vānaravamśa. There is therefore a close kinship link between Rāvaṇa and Sugrīva but there is also a deep-rooted enmity because of frequent conflict.

The *Paumacariyam* is firmly embedded in the Jaina tradition, as firmly as the final Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* was embedded in the Vaiṣṇava Brahmanical tradition. The original *Rāma-kathā* was becoming more and more incidental. This is demonstrated in other versions of the story which were almost contemporary with the *Paumacariyam* such as the plays of Bhāsa and the *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa. The latter is a narrative poem in full classical style with an emphasis on descriptive passages of landscape and the courtly life, aimed at an audience of courts and courtiers. The *Raghuvaṃśa* was in turn to influence other poems and plays on this theme written for a courtly audience, such as Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita* and Kumāradāsa's *Jānakiharan*, and the theme was revived in the *Bhaṭṭikāvya* or *Rāvaṇavadha*. It is curious that whatever the intention of the author whether it be to express ethical, religious or courtly sentiments, the story selected is the same. It had a certain appeal at the ethical level in the depiction of conflict between good and evil and above all had by now become well-entrenched in the Indian tradition. The explanation for the latter would range over many levels of consciousness which would have to be peeled off layer by layer. I would like to limit myself to only one facet, namely, the socio-historical relationships symbolised in the story, and return to my earlier statement, that the fundamental structure of the story juxtaposes two kinds of society: the kingdom and the place of exile.

In the Vālmlki *Rāmāyaṇa* the kingdom and the forest are depicted in vivid contrast. The kingdom of Kosala is by no means vast since by the third day's journey from Ayodhyā, Rāma had come to its frontier and bade farewell to his subjects.[49] Possibly the proximity of forests enclosed the cultivated tracts. Larger forests are mentioned in the early part of the text and the list is expanded for Kosala in Buddhist sources.[50] The direction from Ayodhyā to Citrakūṭa moving south-westwards and crossing the Gaṅga and Yamunā may have been necessitated by having to avoid the heavier forests of southern Faizabad and Azamgarh, and remain along the more elevated part of the plain.[51] The frequency of forests permitted the continuance of hunting and pastoralism although less prestigious than agriculture.

That agriculture was the dominant economy is clear from the frequent references to gardens, fields, agricultural activities and villages in the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa.[52] Kauśalya, the mother of Rāma is said to have owned one thousand villages, reminiscent of the later story of the princess of Kosala who had a village in Kāśi given her by her father for bath and perfume money.[53]

The royal treasure is frequently computed as *dhānyakośa*, stores of grain.[54] Bharata hearing of Rāma's return bestows a gift on Hanumān of a hundred thousand head of cattle and a hundred villages.[55] There is also a reference to the gifting of slaves after the marriage ceremony.[56] On his departure from Girivraja, Kekeya, his maternal uncle, gives Bharata a gift of elephants, woollen clothes, antelope skins, two thousand *niṣkas* of gold, specially bred dogs and sixteen hundred horses.[57] Kekeya sends Rāma ten thousand horses, carpets, gems, textiles and ornaments.[58] The high incidence of horses was because the kingdom of Kekeya was situated in that part of the Punjab which was involved in the import of horses from Kamboja and central Asia as indeed also of woollen cloth. Even allowing for poetic exaggeration, the list of items would suggest a fairly evolved economy.

The people of Ayodhyā are described as citizens—*pauresu*[59]—of a flourishing city. Ayodhyā was one among a number of other cities such as Mithilā, Sankasya, (the capital of Kuśadhvaja, brother of Janaka, situated on the Ikṣumatī river), Kauśāmbi, Mahodaya, Dharmāranya, Girivraja and Rājagṛha (in Magadha).[60] Each *janapada* had its major city as the nucleus of its political and economic life. The detailed descriptions of Ayodhyā conforming to the layout of developed urban centres of later periods occur in the Bāla-kāṇḍa.[61] The list of craftsmen and artisans who follow Bharata in search of Rāma suggests an urban commercial centre with its jewellers, armourers, ivory workers, smiths, wool merchants, distillers, washermen, tailors *et al.*[62] The archaeology of the Ganges plain shows that the earliest urbanisation dates to the period of the Northern Black Polished Ware of the mid-first millennium BC. These descriptions of Ayodhyā would date to a period subsequent to that.

Not surprisingly kingship is eulogised and it is stated that countries without kings are doomed. A lengthy description sets out the terrors which await a kingless land.[63] Priority in such a situation is given to an absence of rain, grain, filial obedience, wealth, law, buildings, sacrifices, festivals, merchants, security, cheerful young men, scholars, ascetics and the army. Indeed the picture is very bleak. Kingship alone is legitimate and its absence can only result in anarchy. The dangers of unscrupulous kings are warned against for they can bring about drought and suffering for the subjects. The association of rain with benevolent rule was an established axiom in early Indian political thought and there are many occasions when bad government leads to a twelve-year drought terminated by the return of the rightful king or by the performance of rituals by a worthy ascetic.[64] The *Ramāyaṇa* therefore presents a rather orthodox picture of political legitimacy, reflecting firm faith in monarchy as the only acceptable system.

Another long discourse sets out the duties of the king, when Rāma questions Bharata on the well-being of the family and the kingdom.[65] Bharata is asked if he consults his ministers, keeps an eye on neighbours, looks after the army, attends to irrigation and animal wealth, keeps the fortresses well-defended, performs the required rituals, gives generously in *dāna* and observes the *varṇāsramadharma*. The reference to ministers requires the listing of the eighteen officials for efficient functioning, a far more complex administrative structure than is warranted by the story.[66] An established monarchical system must have an equally established system of succession. Bharata argues against his being made king by referring to the rule of primogeniture among the Ikṣvākus and this is reiterated by Vasiṣṭha who recites the Ikṣvāku lineage to demonstrate the succession of the eldest son.[67]

Vedic orthodoxy is sustained by the ritual of sacrifice. Daśaratha performs an *aśvamedha* to obtain sons and Rāma performs one on his return to Ayodhyā.[68] One of the foremost Vedic deities, Indra, important in the early sections is demoted in the Bāla-kāṇḍa and the Uttara-kāṇḍa.[69] In the same sections, the power of the ascetic is repeatedly stressed.[70] An apparent anomaly in the text relates to the question of *śūdra* ascetics. In the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa we are told that the young ascetic whom Daśaratha had shot by mistake and whose blind parents then placed a curse on Daśaratha, was a *sūdra*, being of a *śūdra* mother and a *vaiśya* father.[71] Yet in the Uttara-kāṇḍa Rāma goes out of his way to kill a *śūdra* ascetic because of his audacity at daring to be an ascetic; the argument being that only in the Kaliyuga will *śūdra* ascetics be tolerated.[72]

The location of exile is invariably the forest and this symbolises a completely different way of life. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* the *rākṣasas* and the *vānaras* represent the opposite pole. The *rāksaṣas* are everywhere, even in the forests of Kosala although their main concentration lies south of the Ganges plain. Their depiction as demon-like creatures in the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not detract from the fact that they represent a human society and this is corroborated by the *Paumacariyam*. In spite of many of them being familiar with Vedic ritual they attack the *ṛṣis* and are described as practitioners of sorcery (*yātudhāna*).[73] They appear to have had an oligarchic organisation since there is little mention of monarchy among them and the word *gaṇa* is associated with them.[74] It is also curious that Rāvaṇa whose father was the *brahma-rṣi* Pulastya is however given the status of his mother who was a *rākṣasi*. There are many lineage sub-divisions of the *rākṣasas* mentioned in the *Purāṇas* among which the Viśvamitra/Kauśika are included.[75] Rāvaṇa is described as *daśagrīva* in the Uttara-kāṇḍa but elsewhere is treated as a normal human being.[76] His splendour and majesty dazzle Hanumān and even the splendour of Ayodhyā cannot match that of Lankā.[77] An important cultural difference is that some *rākṣasas* are not cremated at death but buried in a pit.[78] In many ways they resemble the *asuras* of the Vedic texts for whom the term *rākṣasa* is used as a synonym.[79] The concentration of the *rākṣasa* in the Vindhyan region would perhaps identify them archaeologically with the Chalcolithic cultures and the Black-and-Red Ware people of the second and early first millennium BC.

Lankā shows no obvious familiarity with plough agriculture.[80] Gardens and woods are plentiful but there are no descriptions of villages and fields. Would this suggest that their agriculture was restricted to swidden and hoe and was pre-plough? Or was the agricultural economy implicit in the description of the wealth of Lankā? There is little evidence of social stratification in the city of Lankā and its inhabitants do not conform to the caste system. Perhaps the society functioned on the basis of tribal chiefships. Women seem more assertive than in Ayodhyā and there is even mention of women participating in conflicts.[81] The abduction of a married woman is not considered a great crime. There is little mention of merchants and artisans in the city of Lankā and yet there is no shortage of wealth. In mineral wealth and precious stones Lankā far exceeds Ayodhyā as also in gold and silver.[82] But in grain and cattle wealth the reverse is true. The availability of gems and gold need not point to the far south as western India was also commercially rich and a supplier of semi-precious stones. One wonders though whether the description of the fabulous city of Lankā was in any way a vague folk memory of the rich cities of the Bronze Age past. Was the wealth of Lankā dependent on exchange where the *rākṣasas* would supply raw materials for trade obtained from forests and mines and exchange these for finished products from the traders? In spite of the display of wealth, the *rākṣasas* do not maintain a style of life which would reflect even a relatively complex economy. Possibly the description of the wealth of the *rākṣasas* was meant to emphasize the power of the enemy with which Rāma had to contend. There is a telling statement that it is difficult to sow dissension among the *rākṣasas*, recalling the statement of the Buddha that the Vajjian strength would survive as long as there was no dissension among the confederate tribes.[83] Hanumān describes the city of Lankā as an extremely well-fortified citadel with multiple lines of defence—the sea (since it was an island), the high city wall, a moat with a drawbridge and bastions over-looking it.[84] It is specifically said that the sea offers no harbours.

In the descriptions of the battles and encounters the weapons generally used are bows and arrows. Swords may be carried as also the superior magical weapons, the *astras*, but they are not frequently resorted to. More complete lists of weapons are given in the description of the soldiers guarding Lankā and in the course of the great battle when the *vānaras* go into action against the *rākṣasas*.[85] The chariot is evidently not preferred, for although both Rāma and Rāvaṇa face each other in chariots, the crux of the combat is on foot. Rāvana is killed by an arrow from Rāma's bow, but it is no ordinary arrow having been given to Rāma by Agastya.[86]

The *rākṣasas* are essentially meat-eaters with a fondness for venison, buffalo meat, wild boar, peacock, hare and goat-meat.[87] The references to rice, generally parched *lājāḥ*, are often in the context of a religious ritual or a ceremony and rarely as part of a meal.[88] In one case only grain is said to have miraculously appeared in a heap for the satisfaction of the gargantuan hunger of Kumbhakarṇa.[89]

The *vānaras* and the *rikṣas* seem to be the poor relations of the *rākṣasas*. The *rikṣas* are associated with the Vindhyan region.[90] Although they are the allies of Rāma they are closer in their living habits to the *rākṣasas*. An earlier conflict between the *vānaras* and the *rākṣasas* is mentioned and both the *Paumacariyam* and the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* speak of close kinship ties.[91] Kiṣkindhā is described as a deep and large cave.[92] The *vānaras* are inevitably consumers of forest produce such as fruit and roots and drinkers of alcohol.[93] Despite the kinship ties it is evident that the *vānaras* are regarded as inferior to the *rākṣasas* and appear to hold the latter in awe. Not all forests are the habitat of the *vānaras*; some are held sacred such as the Madhu-vana to which entry is forbidden except on certain occasions.[94] The practice of *niyoga*, levirate, seems to have prevailed among them since Tārā the widow of Vālin marries his younger brother Sugrīva as a normal practice. Elsewhere the gifts given by Guha the king of the Niṣāda-vaṃśa to Bharata are typical tribal products: fish, flesh (not animals on the hoof), honey, roots and fruit. Such descriptions even if exaggerated do suggest a food-gathering society and distinctly less advanced as compared to Lankā.[95]

It has been said that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a symbolic depiction of the dominance of the landlords (with their god, Rāma) over the peasants (Hanumān) or that it represents the conflict between agriculturists and food-gatherers.[96] It could also be described in different historical terms as the juxtaposition between kingdoms as state systems and tribal chiefships prior to the emergence of the state, the relationship often dissolving into confrontation. The former would be a redistributive economy in the early stages implying increasing social stratification; juxtaposed with this was a society based on reciprocal exchange with a limited orbit of redistribution. The representation of this was by no means unique to the *Rāmāyaṇa* for it occurs repeatedly in Indian mythology. The popular myth of the killing of king Veṇa, followed by the exile of Niṣāda and the rise of Pṛthu is but another variant on this theme.[97] The Buddhist versions of the *Rāma-kathā* suggest a society of tribal chiefships and possibly the original *Rāma-kathā* was restricted to these, where the difference between the societies of Ayodhyā and Lankā would have been recognisable but not extensive. The Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, perhaps deliberately, highlights the difference and we have a confrontation between the kingdom with all the trappings of the state on the one hand and tribal chiefships with limited reciprocal relationships on the other. It is interesting that the characteristics of an evolved state system—extensive agriculture, urban centres, centralisation of political power, the evolution of caste society—are referred to more frequently in the first and last books of the text and with reference to Kosala.

The juxtaposition between the state and tribal chiefships has been a facet of the historical situation in India from the earliest period into recent times. But in the emphasis on the study of monarchical states the other side has been neglected. This might perhaps provide a clue as to why the *Rāma-kathā* has been a perennial theme from century to century. Admittedly this is only a partial explanation but nevertheless it is worth pursuing. The more obvious religious explanations relate to the spread of Vaiṣṇavism and cultural explanations relate to the acceptance of Sanskritic culture in new areas. The internalisation of this culture initially took the form of a Sanskrit knowing literati emerging as elite groups in areas newly exposed to Sanskritic culture. Later, with the emergence of a regional consciousness the components of the Sanskritic culture were adapted and translated into the regional languages and these texts became the channel of acculturation between the literati and their hinterland. Inevitably there was an interplay between the classical tradition and the local culture. The original dispersal of the classical tradition was the result of many historical factors—conquest of new lands, migrations, the opening up of new trade resources and routes and the extension of agriculture. The dominance of the classical culture was established through political control over the new areas and these introduced changes which were generally limited to the elite levels. The impact of migration was wider where the numbers were large. The last two forms were the ones with the fullest and most permanent influence since these required an integration into the new areas and involved many more levels of social strata in this process.

The extension of agriculture has been a normal activity throughout the sub-continent characterising Indian history in all periods. This sometimes took the form of state supervised settlement, where for example, it is suggested that families of *śūdra* cultivators should be settled on waste land to bring it under cultivation. The *Arthaśāstra* describes this as one of the methods of extending agriculture and cultivation. Here the motivation was both the increase of cultivation and thereby increase of revenue for the state as well. On other occasions waste land was sometimes granted by the king in revenue-free grants. These could perhaps have been due at times to a pressure on land requiring the extension of agriculture. The intensification of this activity often resulted in the formation of a new state, which, with centralisation of power was converted into a monarchy.[98] There is evidence of the hostility with which major monarchies regarded the *gaṇa-saṅgha* system of tribal oligarchies[99] in spite of the latter being based on an agrarian economy. In other situations the extension of agriculture could encroach upon tribal territory, particularly if the area was fertile and such encroachments appear to have been resisted. Not only does the Mauryan emperor Aśoka threaten the forest tribes within his empire,[100] but Samudragupta of a later period takes pride in having reduced to servitude the tribal chiefships.[101] Conflict could be avoided only in those areas where there was no encroachment on tribal territory. It would not require much imagination to identify the *rakṣasas* symbolically as the enemy in such a conflict. Land, recently cleared and brought under cultivation, gradually became the base for the rise of new kingdoms. Monarchy required legitimisation and this was often sought through the performance of royal sacrifices sanctified in Vedic texts.[102] The frequency of donations of land to *brāhmanas* learned in the *Vedas* was in part the gratitude of legitimised dynasties and in part the cultivation by patrons of those whom they believed would bring them cultural credit. Not surprisingly there is considerable emphasis, particularly in the Uttara-kāṇḍa on the efficacy of Vedic sacrifices. In addition to the ceremonies it also became necessary to claim the appropriate *varṇa* status which for ruling dynasties was the claim to being *kṣatriyas*. This was established by seeking lineage connections with one of the two major lineages, the Sūryavaṃśa or the Candravaṃśa, or some other status-conferring origin as for example, the Agni-kula. Those latching themselves on to the Sūryavaṃśa lineage would naturally encourage the propagation of the great epic of this lineage, the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[103] The strengthening of caste was reflected in the statement that among the king's duties are the prevention of the mixing of castes and the maintenance of the *varṇāśramadharma*.

The forest was also the habitat of the *ṛṣis*, the *vanaprasthas* and the *samnyāsins* who on many occasions acted as the frontiersmen establishing their hermitages in forest clearings. These were the natural targets of attack from those who regarded the forests as their natural habitat. The hermitages tended to become a political no-man's-land out of reach of the kingdoms. The ascetics having already opted out of society could, all the same, influence those within through the demonstration of the power of *tapas* and the fact of being beyond the law.[104] Perhaps because of this (in addition to other reasons), the institution of the *āśrama* was eventually adopted by every major religious sect, whether in the form of a *vihāra* or a *maṭha*. In the structure of power the king in his kingdom and the ascetic in his exile became counter-weights, one embedded in duties, obligations and rights and the other emancipated from these.

At the other end of the scale the cults of the mountain and forest gods and the fertility goddesses were subordinated to the deities of the kingdom. It could be argued that the ultimate expulsion of Sītā is the rejection of the primitive fertility goddess in which the testing of chastity becomes a crucial element. As an agricultural deity too she is substituted by a manifestation of the solar god, dominant among agricultural deities.[105]

Trade was another activity which changed with the formation of states. Direct barter and exchange of commodities was replaced by systems of markets and specialists, both artisans and merchants. Trading groups had to be socially more flexible and narrow sectarian interests militated against commercial success. Such groups often found doctrines of universalistic ethics more acceptable as is indicated in the extensive patronage of mercantile groups to Buddhism and Jainism. Traders would probably tend to be more sympathetic to tribal societies if they were suppliers of raw material such as timber, semi-precious stones and forest produce. The Vindhyan region was a prime supplier of raw materials to the traders of western India in the early period.[106] It is curious that no mention is made of the Buddhists and Jainas in any of the later interpolations of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. This may have made the *Paumacariyam* necessary although the implicit argument that the *rākṣasas* have been misrepresented in the other versions remains a significant reason. It has been suggested that the route which Rāma took when exiled from Ayodhyā was the one which was to become a regular trade route from the middle Ganges valley to the Deccan—the *dakṣiṇāpatha*.[107] In this case the Kosalan migration meant not merely the extension of agriculture but also the forging of trade routes. Kosala was a major area on the northern route and inevitably some attempt would be made to extend its reach in the southern direction.

The incidence of land grants to *brāhmanas* and others shows a striking increase towards the end of the first millennium AD, pointing to an acceleration of land being brought under cultivation.[108] In the early centuries of the second millennium AD the scale and numbers increase with officials and vassals using the fiscal and administrative rights to carve out innumerable small kingdoms. Some of these grants included extensive areas of villages and fields, others were of waste land which required clearing and settling. The inscriptions of the time do refer to hostilities against tribal groups and evidently encroachments into their territory continued. At the same time another characteristic of this period is the proliferation of castes, particularly of *śūdra* castes. Often the names of the latter refer them back to earlier periods of tribal chiefships. Confrontation was being diluted with conciliation and the conversion of tribes into castes was coming on apace; or else there was the exclusion of tribes from caste society altogether which is reflected in the noticeable increase in numbers of impure *śūdras* and untouchables.

Where tribes were inducted into the caste structure, assistance was sought for the process of assimilation from religious cults and sects. The pliability of mythology was stretched to the full. Brahmanical deities were placed in new situations and performed a series of innovatory roles. The *avatāra* theory as applied to Viṣṇu had already functioned as a channel of assimilation and the extension of Sanskritic culture.[109] Tribal deities were also introduced into orthodox cults so that the end result was a two-way process of acculturation though certainly with a weightage in favour of the courtly, Sanskritic and Brahmanical culture. The *Rāmāyaṇa* captures the process; Rāma is the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu and by the same token Hanumān is elevated into the Vaiṣṇavite pantheon. The *Rāmāyaṇa* therefore is the text *par excellence*, at many levels of this process, ably assisted by a large variety of *Purāṇas* spanning both classical and parochial cultures.

As the historian would expect there is an efflorescence in the composition of versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* during this period. Many of these composed at the end of the first millennium AD carry a strong stamp of Vaiṣṇava sectarian positions.[110] They reflect the deep influence of the *avatāra* theory and the deification of Rāma as Viṣṇu's *avatāra*. Some were influenced by the Śākta cult and Sītā is subsumed by Devī performing feats absent in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*: the Sītā kidnapped by Rāvaṇa is illusory, the real Sītā returning to Ayodhyā. Even more interesting from the historical point of view are the series of *Rāmāyaṇas* written in the infancy of the regional languages in the early centuries of the second millennium AD.[111] In most places the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* was familiar to the literati of the time, yet it was thought necessary to translate it into the regional language or at least to have an adaptation of it available for popular use. Many of these versions incorporate new episodes, to a greater or lesser degree, and are often rooted in local tradition. Above all their major religious orientation is to the *bhakti* aspect of Vaiṣṇavism.

These new *Rāmāyaṇas*, like some of the earlier ones also propagated the values of the kingdom, but in addition they played the role of a medium in giving expression to a regional identity. For example, the Vālmīki

Rāmāyaṇa was doubtless known in the lower Assam valley with the initial spread of Vaiṣṇavism after the seventh century AD. Sometime in the fourteenth century AD Mādhava Kandali translated the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*,[112] minus both the Bāla and Uttara *kāṇḍas*, into Assamese. Rāma was still an *ādipuruṣa*, a hero and not a deity. The first and last books were added later, it is thought by Śankaradeva who was also influenced by the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. The text was now ready for use in the propagation of Vaiṣṇavism which was accompanied by the establishment of the well-endowed and powerful *satras*, the monastic institutions which became the centres of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite sect.[113] The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement coincided with the acceleration of agricultural activities in the upper Assam valley, the opening up of the area to traders and the consolidation of the Ahom state. The emphasis on *bhakti* provided the universalistic ethic appropriate to these historical changes. The historical function of the *Rāma-kathā* in Assamese thus continued the older tradition as well as adapting itself to new needs. The story was worked over in accordance with the theological and social requirements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and these new versions were more pertinent to Assamese society. Fragments from the epics composed in Assamese were adapted to the Assamese literary background. Doubtless the same procedure could be traced for many other parts of the sub-continent and further afield.[114]

The historical theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is that of the triumph of the kingdom over the forest or the condition of exile. Of the many layers of consciousness embedded in the epic, this is but one. That the *Rāmāyaṇa* represents the victory of the Aryans over the Dravidians seems an unduly narrow way of looking at the text[115] and its later versions and would certainly be inadequate if not inappropriate to understanding many of the latter. Nor can the theme in its identification with Vaiṣṇavism be restricted to a religious framework alone. I have tried to suggest that each of the major versions reflected a specific social background in the way in which the story was projected; that the symbolic confrontation of kingdom and exile was on occasion identified with the real bipolarity of kingdom and forest, and of caste as encapsulated in the *varṇāsramadharma* with tribe; of religious assimilation through Vaiṣṇavism of a variety of animistic cults and beliefs; of the formation of states and new kingdoms created out of erstwhile tribal territory; and at the base of all this the migration of peoples and the stabilising of settlements as nuclei of newly evolving cultures. Above all, I have tried to suggest that particular social and religious situations would tend to encourage the continuity of the theme although enveloped in diverse forms. This makes the analysis of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the changes it underwent at certain points in time, historically more challenging; and the epic acquires an additional dimension as a symbol of historical change.

References

* This lecture is based on some of the research which I carried out whilst on a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship during 1976–77: R. T. Rao Bahadur R. Narasimhachar Endowment Lecture. © The Mythic Society, 1978. Used with permission.

1. Lassen, C., *Indische Alterthumskunde* (Leipzig 1847–1862) II; Jacobi, H., *The Ramayana* (Trans. Baroda 1960); Sen, D. C, *The Bengali Ramayanas* (Calcutta 1920); Pusalkar, A. D., *Studies in the Epics and the Purānas* (Bombay, 19S5); Bulcke, C., *Rāmakathā* (Allahabad 1950); Vyas, S. N., *India in the Ramayana Age* (Delhi, 1967); Winterintz, M., *History of Indian Literature* (Calcutta, 1927, 1933).
2. Levy, G. R., *The Sword from the Rock*, (London, 1953); Ker, W. P., *Epic and Romance*, (London, 1931), p. 29.
3. V. Propp has attempted to separate the component parts of the folktale in *The Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, 1971). He suggests segments such as: the hero has to leave home, the villain appears and decides on the stratagem, the villain acts and the victim is captured, the hero obtains a magical helper, after a protracted delay the hero confronts the villain, and so on. If this is applied to the story of the kidnapping of Sītā it can be examined as an episode probably based on a folktale.
4. Bhatt, G. H., (ed.), *The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa*, Vol. I, p. xivff. (Baroda, 1960). The Critical Edition, is henceforth referred to as C.E. All references in this paper are to the C.E.
5. The *alaṁkāra* or descriptive imagery can be either *śabdālamkāra* (verbal imagery), or *arthālamkāra* (ideational). Both are necessary and their interconnection makes for poetic style. Bhāmaha, *Kāvyālamkāra*, I. 14–15, quoted in Bhattacharya, S., *Imagery in the Mahabharata* (Calcutta, 1971). The *Rāmāyaṇa* resounds to the echo of phrases such as, *kamalapatrākṣa* V. 33.8.; *tāmrakṣau* and *raktākṣau; puruṣarṣabha; nīlameghanimbham* VI. 70.6. often used to describe the *rākṣasas* resembling a dark and fearful cloud; *pūrnacandranibhānanām* VII. 9.12.
6. Stereotypes abound also in the description of the ideal king, man and hero, I. 1.8ff; or Rāma as the lover experiencing the agony of separation from Sītā in the spring, IV. 1; the description of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, V. 33. There is a

frequency of the rain of flowers each time a virtuous action is performed and the air resounds with the cries of *sādhu, sādhu*, I. 48. 19–20; I. 72. 24.

7. The story of Rāma's exile is told more than once, VI. 116; as also the stories of Hanumān's journey to Lankā and his fetching of the healing herb when he brings the top of the mountain as well, VI. 84 and VI. 85. The description of the journey from Ayodhyā to Citrakūta is repeated twice in the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa although the context is different in each case. These were stock formulae of the bardic profession when an effective description could be repeated or an action which had won the admiration of the audience. Repetition was also less of a tax on the memory in the days when these epics were entirely oral. Since the epic could not be recited at one sitting it was necessary sometimes to repeat a section to revive the memory of the audience.
8. For example, *mahābhāga-mahābhāga, mahābaḷa-mahābala*, etc; used as verse fillers. (C.E. VI. p. xxxi).
9. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is always referred to as a *kāvya* unlike the *Mahābhārata* which is often called *itihāsa*. The epic is included in a variety of terms such as, *aitihāsika, vīracaritrakāvya, kathā* and *mahākāvya*.
10. Winternitz, M., *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, p. 435ff. (Calcutta, 1927). Bulcke, C., 'The Genesis of the Valmiki Ramayana Recensions', *JOI*, Baroda, Sept. 1955, pp. 66–94. Both Jacobi *The Ramayana* (trans. Baroda, 1960) and Sen, D. C., *The Bengali Ramayanas* (Calcutta, 1920) support the idea that independent episodes focusing on Ayodhyā, Rāvana and Kiṣkindha have been brought together in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Jacobi maintains that the story involving the exile is completely mythical, and the kidnapping of Sītā linked the two main stories. C. Bulcke, *Rāmakathā* (Allahabad, 1971), supports the unity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a theme, but does indicate the multiple traditions which co-existed with the standard *Rāmāyaṇa*. Ramashraya Sharma, *Sociopolitical Study of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Delhi, 1971), argues that Books I and VII are integral to the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, but does not support his view with any new or definitive argument.
11. Sankalia, H. D., *Ramayana, Myth or Reality*, (New Delhi, 1973) 'The Ur (original) Ramayana or Archaeology and the Ramayana' *Indologen-Tagung*, 7–9 October, 1871, Weisbaden 1973. Sankalia raises the question of many features of post-Maurya and later times which are mentioned centrally in the text, such as the use of iron, *kauśeya* silk, the signet-ring, the *gaja-lakṣmi* form, *gopuras* and *śikharas* and the details of the *pañcāṅga*. Sankalia argues that the text of the critical edition is of the fifth century AD or later. The depiction of life is that of northern India during this period. He further emphasises as has been done by other scholars earlier, that Lankā is likely to be located in the Vindhyan region and not in south India or south-east Asia. He suggests that the activities described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* relate to the

destruction of chalcolithic cultures by iron age cultures. Together with the interpolating of episodes, came the extension of the geographical dimension. Various recensions of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* included local areas and local geography and it can be argued that the location of Lankā gradually shifted southwards from central India. The geographical descriptions in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are confused. The name Lankā for Ceylon although said to be an early name is first mentioned in the Pāli Chronicles of the mid-first millennium AD. Earlier sources refer to Tāmraparṇi, Pārasamudra and Sinhala. Lankā is linked with the Tamil *ilangai-divam;* Subrahmanian, N., *Pre-Pallava Tamil Index* (Madras, 1966), p. 114, which occurs in the *Manimegalai.* 28. 107 and dates to the early centuries AD. See also Lassen, C., *Indische Altertumskunde*, II, p. 505.

12. Such as the legends about Śunaḥśepa, the birth of Skanda, the descent of the Ganges, Sagara, the churning of the ocean, Ahalya, Triśanku, and so on. The versions included in the Bāla-kāṇḍa bear a close resemblance to those as they occur in the major *Purāṇas*. This would support a date of the early first millennium AD for the text, since even if the legends came from a common source the form in which they occur is similar to that of the *Purāṇas.*
13. Antoine, R., *Rama and the Bards* (Calcutta, 1975), p. 46ff.
14. *Aśokāvadāna*; Prazyluski, J., *La Legende de l'Empereur Açoka* (Paris, 1923), p. 283ff.
15. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna*, Chs. 69–72, 113, 116, 122–27.
16. Jacobi, H., *The Ramayana* (trans. Baroda 1960), p. 49ff. C.E. Vol. I. p. 432ff. The term continues to be so used even as late as the *Amarakośa* which speaks of *cāranastu kuśilavāḥ*, II. 11.
17. C.E. Vol. I, 4.
18. The term *sūta* originally used for bards came to be used for charioteers, perhaps when the bards lost their monopoly over the *itihāsa* tradition. *Sūta* in the sense of charioteer had a low status by the time of Manu and since no mention is made of a different status for bards it can be assumed that all *sūtas* had the same status. In the Vedic texts inviolability is granted to the *sūtas*, (*namo sūtaya ahantyāya*) *Taittirīya Saṃhita*, IV. 3.2. but in later times the position changes. *Vāyu Purāṇa*, I. 31–2; *Manu* X. 11.
19. Jacobi, H., *The Ramayana*, Sen, D. C., *The Bengali Ramayanas*, (Calcutta, 1920), p. 26ff.
20. Bulcke has argued that the *Daśaratha Jātaka* is based not on the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* but on an earlier version of the *Rāma-kathā*, although the actual *Jātaka* may have been composed as late as the fifth century AD. Bulcke, C., *Rāmakathā* (Allahabad, 1971), p. 53ff.
21. Fausboll, V., (ed.) *The Jātakas* (London, 1877–97), 7 vols. Daśaratha J. No. 461; Sāma J. No. 540; Vessantara J. No. 547; Sambula J. No. 519; Nalinikā J. No. 526; Jayaddisa J. No. 513. For the Anāmaka Jātaka, Bulcke, C., *Rāmakathā*, p. 55.

22. *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* I, pp. 260–262; *Dīgha Nikāya* I. 103, *Sutta Nipata* Com. I. 357.
23. The close association of Kāśi with both Videha and Kosala is reflected in the compound names which occur in the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* III. 82 and the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* I. 2.9.
24. *Vāyu Purāṇa* 88.198.
25. The link of the Ikṣvākus with the region of Danḍaka is stressed in the *Purāṇas*. Pargiter, F. E., *The Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* (London, 1922), p. 257ff. Of Ikṣvāku's hundred sons, apart from Vikukṣi and Nimi, one is called Danḍaka and of the remaining ninety-seven approximately half ruled in Uttarapatha and half in Dakṣinapatha. Lava inherited Uttara-kosala with its capital at Śrāvasti. This was to become a major city in the Buddhist period with the decline of Ayodhyā and Sāketa. Law, B.C., *Historical Geography of Ancient India* (Paris, 1954), p. 47ff. Kuśa ruled over Dakṣina-kosala which is identified in inscriptions of the historical period with Bilaspur, Raipur and Sambalpur near the Mekala range. Gupta, P., *Geography in Ancient Indian Inscriptions* (Delhi, 1973), p. 30ff. It was evidently thought necessary to link Dakṣina-kosala with Kosala at some stage and the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* came in appropriately to do so. It is possible that the Rāvaṇa episode may refer to a local hero of this region whose local epic was partially incorporated into the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when the area was subjected to the control of a power from the north.
26. Ikṣvāku is mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* X. 60.4. in the late sections and members of the lineage are referred to in Later Vedic literature especially Janaka Vaidehi, *Śatapatha Brāhmana* II. 3.1.2–4. The genealogy is given in some detail in the *Purāṇas*, e.g. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV. 2.
27. Pargiter, F. E., *The Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, p. 90ff.
28. C.E. Vol. I. 69–70.
29. Some of the names listed in the Puranic sources of the kings descended from Vikukṣi are familiar from the *Ṛgveda* such as Purukutsa and his son, Trāsadasyu, Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, II, p. 541, suggesting that the Ikṣvākus may have migrated east from the western Ganges valley. This tradition would be supported by the story of Videgha Māthava crossing the Sadanīra river (Gandak) and lending his name to the territory of Videha, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I.4.1.
30. Janaka, the king of Videha, is mentioned with respect in later Vedic literature as a philosopher, *Vedic Index*, I, p. 273. This was probably not the father of Sītā, Janaka Sīradhvaja but an earlier person. The *Rāmāyaṇa* also refers to at least two Janakas, I. 70.4; I. 65.12–13; C.E. I. p. 441. Buddhist literature also refers to more than one Janaka, Aritthajanaka and Polajanaka the sons of Mahājanaka, *Mahājanaka Jātaka* No. 539. Mahājanaka and Nimi are listed among the early kings of Videha. Malalasekara, G., *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, II. p. 880.

In the *Nimi Jātaka*, No. 541 Nimi is a king interested in philosophy and asceticism echoing the description of Janaka in Vedic literature.

31. Falk Moore, S., 'Descent and Symbolic Filiation', *The American Anthropologist*, 1964, No. 66, Pt. 1., pp. 1308–20.
32. *Gandhāra Jātaka* No. 406, *Mahājanaka* J. No. 539, *Papañca Sudani*, Majjhima Com. I. 534. The reference to the Buddha preaching there occurs in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, II, 74 and 133.
33. Pathak, V., *History of Kosala*, (Varanasi, 1963), pp. 84–114.
34. Thapar, R., 'Genealogy as a source of Social History', *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. II, No. 2, January 1976, pp. 259–281.
35. Raghavan, V., *The Greater Ramayana*, (Varanasi, 1973), p. 33ff.
36. Raghavan, *The Greater Ramayana*, pp. 40–44.
37. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV. 2.
38. Śānti Parva, XII, 19.43–55; Drona Parva, Critical Appendix 8. Another summary of the story is recited in the Vana Parva III. 147. 28–38. There is an absence of Viśvamitra as also of Ahalaya, nor is there an *agni-parīkṣā* for Sītā. Vaidya, P. L., (cd.) *The Mahābhārata*, Critical Edition, VI, p. xxxii.
39. van Buitenen, J. A. B., (ed. and trs.) *The Mahābhārata*, III, (Chicago 1975), p. 207ff.
40. Raghavan, V., *The Greater Ramayana*, p. 25ff. cf. Jacobi, H., *The Ramayana*, p. 71ff. Jacobi suggests that the *Rāmopākhyāna* is the epitome of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. Weber, 'Uber das Ramayana', *Abhandlungen der Berliner Akad. der Wissenschaft Philhist. Klasse*, 1870, 1–88, suggests four possibilities, including a common source now lost. These points are discussed further in the Critical Edition Vol. VII. p. 29, VI, pp. xxxi–vi of the *Mahābhārata*.
41. Shende, N. J., 'Authorship of the Ramayana', *Journal of the University of Bombay*, 1943, XII, (New Series) Pt. 2, pp. 19–24ff.
42. It has been argued that the existing version was that of Vālmīki since the criticism of Vimalasūri seems to refer to this version, it being the established version in Brahmanical culture, Kulkarni, V. M., 'Origin and Development of the Rama story in Jaina Literature', *J.O.I.*, Baroda, March 1960, IX, No. 2, pp. 189–204. Significantly, Vimalasuri refers to the existing version as that of the 'heretics' and therefore one can expect certain reversals in the story, although the influence of Vālmīki on the style and language remains apparent. Chandra, K. R., *A Critical Study of the Paumacariyam* (Delhi, 1972), p. 18ff.
43. *Paumacariyam* II. 116.
44. The date in the text is given as 530 years after Mahāvīra which most scholars equate with the first century AD. Jacobi argues in favour of the third century AD, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, VI, p. 437. Kulkarni, V.M., *Vimalasūri's Paumacariyaṃ* (Kāśi 1962), pp. 1–40; others support the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, II, pp. 477–78; Dhruva,

K. B., *Introduction to Prakrit*, JASB, Vol. XX, no. 56, Bombay 1902; Chandra, K. R., *A Critical Study of the Paumacariyam.*

45. The geographical locale of *Paumacariyam* is a strong argument in favour of the theory that Lankā be situated in the Vindhyan region. Although a later text than the Vālmìki *Rāmāyaṇa* the *Paumacariyam* does not seem to identify Lanka with the Śri Lankā of today. The Vidyādhara lineage which is said to be that of the *rākṣasas* and *vānaras* is known from other sources as well and has been generally located in the Vindhyan region. Chandra, K. R., *A Critical Study of the Paumacariyam*, p. 208ff.
46. Sanghadāsagani's *Vāsudevahindi* refers to Sītā being the daughter of Rāvaṇa and this is followed in some later Jaina works such as the *Uttarapurāṇa* of Guṇabhadra and Hemacandra's *Ṣaṣṭiśalākapuruṣacaritra.*
47. *Paumacariyam*, II. 25.7.
48. *Paumacariyam*, V. 14–19.
49. II. 43.7. Rāma crosses the boundary of Kosala and then comes to the Gomati river.
50. Ambavana I. 47–48; Taṭakāvana 1.23; Mahāvana, *Papañca Sudanī*, I. 298; Añjanavana, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* I. 54; Andhavana, *Vinaya Piṭaka* III. 28; Lumbinivana; Jetavana, *Vinaya Pitaka* II. 158ff; Ketakavana, *Nalapāna Jātaka* No. 20; Jālīnavana, *Theragāthā Com.* II.58; Tikanṭakīvana, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* III. p. 169ff. The extent of forest would have been greater in pre-Buddhist times.
51. The flora of the forests is not of much help since many of the names are repeated for poetic effect. The *śāla* tree seems to predominate and this had its natural habitat in the area north of Chota Nagpur. Sankalia, H. D., *Ramayana, Myth or Reality*, p. 7ff.
52. Chanana, Dev Raj, *The Spread of Agriculture in Northern India*, New Delhi, 1963. *Rām.* II. 30.16; 33.17; 43.3–4. Dharma, P. C., 'Occupations and Professions as seen in the Ramayana,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Research Institute*, Vol. XIX, 1938, pp. 127–46. The plough is referred to only in the first and seventh *kāṇḍas*, I. 38.19; VII. 17.30. In the first case it is mentioned that the ploughshare was used for digging the ground and in the second it is referred to in the context of a simile. See also J. N. Samaddar, 'Economic Culture as Depicted in the Valmiki Rāmāyana,' *P.T.O.C.* II. (Calcutta, 1922), pp. 379–388.
53. *Rām.* II. 28.7 *Vaddhaki-sukara Jātaka* No. 283.
54. *Rām.* II. 32.6.
55. *Rām.* VI. 113.41.
56. *Rām.* I. 73.5
57. *Rām.* II. 64.16ff.
58. *Rām.* VII. 90. 1–5.
59. *Rām.* II. 4.1.

60. *Rām.* I. 65.18–20; I. 69.2–3, I. 31.4–7; II. 61.6. It is interesting that but for Ayodhyā and Girivraja (the Kekeya capital) which are mentioned in the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa the references to the other cities are from the Bāla-kāṇḍa.
61. Ayodhyā has large gates and markets, well-planned and surrounded by a moat. The city streets had elephants, horses, cattle and camels and mules. There were large dwellings owned by traders and people from other places. The palaces were stocked with jewels, the houses of the artisans with rice and sugarcane, indicative of general well-being, I.5. The ordinary people were well-fed, owned jewels and clothes. There was an absence of thieves as also of people of mixed castes, I.6. The *kṣatriyas* rode in the city on their resplendent horses. The *brāhmanas* were familiar with the six systems of philosophy. These descriptions occur in the late sections of the text.
62. *Rām.* II. 77.12–15.
63. *Rām.* II. 61. 7ff.
64. Such as the many versions of the story of Devāpi and Śantanu. *Rgveda* X. 98; *Nirukta* II. 10; *Bṛhaddevata* VII. 148ff; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV. 20; It is mentioned in the Bāla-kāṇḍa as well, I. 8. 11ff., and it provides the opening for introducing the legend of Ṛṣiyaṣṛiṅga who restored rainfall to the parched land. The association of rain with fertility is also made amply apparent in this legend.
65. *Rām.* II. 94.
66. *Rām.* II. 94.30. Minister, *purohita*, heir-apparent, commander, door-keeper, superintendent of the women's apartments, jailer, treasurer, city-superintendent, magistrate, councillor, overseer of water, mountains, forest, waste-land and fortifications.
67. *Rām.* 11.73.8; II. 95.2; II. 102. 30.
68. *Rām.* I. 8; and VII. 91. References occur significantly in the first and last books thought to be later.
69. It has been argued that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was worked over by a Bhṛgu editor. (The *Mahābhārata* C.E. XII, 57–40, p. 255... *bhārgavena mahātmana akhyāte rāmcarite* ...) One noticeable characteristic of the Bhṛgu ideology is the ridiculing of Indra. In the Bāla-kāṇḍa, Indra when caught seducing Ahalya is cursed by Gautama, I. 47.27. The Triśanku story shows the power of Viśvamitra in competition with Indra, I. 59. Indra sends Rambhā to tempt Viśvamitra and he turns her into stone, I. 63. Shende, N. J., 'Authorship of the Ramayana', has argued that Viśvamitra was related to the Bhṛgus and therefore the Viśvamitra sub-plot in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is to confer the status of a *ṛṣi* on the Bhṛgu. The most ignominious of all the references is to Rāvaṇa's son Indrajit, defeating Indra in battle, VII. 30. Finally Viṣṇu as Rāma has to avenge Indra's defeat. One of the reasons for the Rāma incarnation is that Bhṛgu cursed Viṣṇu to live apart from his spouse and then lost his *tejas*. Therefore Viṣṇu said he would take a human form and Rāma was separated from his wife. But

this is a very laboured attempt to explain the *agni parīkṣā* as well as give support to the Bhṛgu cause, VII. 51. Lowering the prestige of Indra and making him subject to the power of the *ṛṣis* is also characteristic of much of the Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata* and doubtless goes back to the tradition that the Bhṛgus were not the priests of Indra.

70. Thus Vālmīki foresees the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, I. 3, Daśaratha's hesitations at sending Rāma with Viśvamitra angers the sage at which the whole earth trembles I. 20. 4–5.
71. *Rām.* II. 57.37.
72. *Rām.* VII. 65; VII. 67. 1–6.
73. *Rām.* V. 161.1–2; Indrajit the son of Rāvana performs an *agniyajña* during the battle, VI. 69.22–26. Sometimes the word *yātudhāna* is used adjectivally, e.g. III. 24.5.
74. *Rām.* V. 41.12; V. 46.14.
75. Pargiter, F. E., *The Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, p. 241ff. The Paulastya Rākṣasas were the descendents of the *ṛṣi* Pulastya and were of three categories: the direct descendents of Pulastya, the Pulastya-Agastyas and the Viśvamitras or Kauśikas. They studied the *Vedas* (perhaps the *Atharvaveda* in particular?) performed *tapas* and indulged in *yātudhāna*. These groups may have been the source of the description of the *rākṣasa* in the *Paumacariyam* where they are associated with the Vidyādhara lineage. Some sources refer to the Vidyādharas as being of Rathika and Bhoja stock and located in the Vindhyan region, Law, B. C., *India as described in Early Texts of Buddhism and Jainism*, London, 1941, p. 106ff.
76. *Rām.* III. 49.3–4; IV. 58. 13–23; V. 47. 18; VII. 16. 37–38; VII. 9. 27–32; VII. 15.32.
77. *Rām.* V. 47; VI. 75, 76.
78. *Rām.* III. 3. 23–24.
79. In the *Ṛgveda* the term *asura* is used as a form of respect in some contexts as for example with reference to certain gods, Varuṇa, Indra, Agni, Rudra, I. 24.14, IV. 2.5., VII. 2.3., V. 12.11. They are said to be the progeny of Prajāpati as were the *devas*, and this is emphasised in the fact of a bipolarity between the *devas* and *asuras* in perpetual conflict. In some contexts the *asuras* are described as hostile in speech and action, *Ṛgveda* VII. 18.13; 6.3; X. 23.5.
80. Chanana, Dev Raj, *The Spread of Agriculture in Northern India*, p. 8ff.
81. *Rām.* I. 25; V. 1.173; VI. 24; V. 18.5.
82. Chanana, Dev Raj, *The Spread of Agriculture in Northern India*, pp. 27–29.
83. *Rām.* V. 2.27. *Dīgha Nikāya* II. 96; II. 72ff; *Majjhima Nikāya* III. 8ff.
84. *Rām.* V. 3.
85. *Rām.* IV. 16; VI. 59; V. 3; VI. 62.40; VI. 28.10ff; VI. 66. 4–6.
86. *Rām.* VI. 98.
87. *Rām.* V. 9.11–14; VI. 48. 24–26

88. *Rām.* VI. 60. 21; VI. 100. 16.
89. *Rām.* VI. 48. 25.
90. Ṛkṣa/Ṛkṣavat is located as a place in the central region of the Vindhyas, Law, B. C., *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, p. 328. The word *vānara* has obvious etymological links with *vana*, the forest.
91. The *Rāmāyaṇa* also states that the *rākṣasas* and *vānaras* are like brothers, V. 49. 2–3.
92. *Rām. giriguham*, IV. 25. 7; IV. 36. 8.
93. *Rām.* IV. 36. 7; 36. 30; VI. 18. 31ff.
94. *Rām.* V. 60. 30; 61.5; Rām. II. 49. 9; II. 78. 16.
95. If historical survivals are to be sought then perhaps the one with the greatest potential for the *Rāmāyaṇa* would be a detailed examination of the central Indian Gonds and their neighbours to the east. The parallels have already received some attention (e.g. the introduction to the C.E. Vol. IV) but perhaps systematic work would be more revealing. G. Ramadas, "Rāvaṇa and his tribes". IHQ. June 1929, VI, No. 2, pp. 281–98. J. C. Ghosh, "Rāvaṇa's Lankā located in central India, IHQ V, No. 2, p. 355ff.

    There is among the Gonds the prevalence of various features which echo the social life of the *rākṣasas* and *vānaras* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. There is the memory of clan territory to which access was permitted only on certain occasions and which is now the sanctuary of the god Persa Pen; there is the continued practice of cross-cousin marriage and the prevalence of levirate; there is an obsession with the notion of chastity, Herrenschmidt, O., *Le Cycle de Lingal* (Paris, 1966), pp. 12, 17, 22. Ranking among the Gonds consists of two main groups. The more Hinduised Deo-Gonds have two sub-sects, the Suryabamsi Raj Gond and the Suryabamsi Deo-Garha Gond both of whom claim *kṣatriya* status and neither of which would marry into the second main group, the Ravanabamsi Gonds. Herrenschmidt, *Le Cycle de Lingal*, pp. 2–6. Most commentators have suggested that the term Ravanabamsi comes from the description of the Gonds from caste Hindu sources. However the juxtaposition of Suryabamsi and Ravanabamsi does suggest a more Sanskritised group emerging from among a larger group who were perhaps earlier known as Ravanabamsis. This is a process which would be by no means unique to the Gonds and can be paralleled in many parts of India during the second millennium AD. By the fifteenth century the Gonds were known to have established kingdoms such as Garha-Mandla and Chanda. It has also been suggested that the name Rāvaṇa may have its root in the Dravidian word *iraivan*, meaning a king, Chandra, K. R., *A Critical Study of the Paumacariyam*, p. 549. The Proto-Dravidian form *iraivan* (Burrow, T., and Emeneau, B. M. *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*, Oxford, 1961), No. 448, means one who is great, a king, a lord, a god or a venerable person. The P. Dr. form would then be the equivalent of *deva* or *rāja* in Indo-Aryan. The Deo Gonds and the Ravanabamsi Gonds would therefore be the mirror image of each other, except that over a historical period the latter have become subordinate to the former. The etymological possibility is strengthened by the fact that a section of the Gonds use an early central Dravidian language.

The Gonds have had a special relationship with the Pradhans who were their bards, magicians and medicine-men and who lived on the fee provided by the Gonds. Like all bard-patron relations it was an ambivalent relationship, since they were respected for their knowledge and for their oral records of the past but were also looked down upon for their low status. The lowering of the status may have come about however, relatively recently, with the emergence of the Deo Gonds which would have the effect of widening if not changing the circle of reference. The Pradhan status is however so low that there is no commensality and the Pradhan is forbidden entry to the Gond house: in fact almost the condition of an untouchable. Yet each Gond has a house Pradhan as does each clan god and the Pradhan-Gond tie remains very close. In the worship of the god Persa Pen, the recitation of the Gond epics by the Pradhan is essential. Haimcndorf, C., von Furher, *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad* (London, 1948), p. 47ff. p. 123ff.

The association with the monkey occurs in Gond mythology, particularly the origin myths. In one case, the original four-brother phratry is assisted by the monkeys which establishes a special relationship with the monkeys. It is agreed that no Gond will till a field abandoned by a monkey or marry a wife similarly abandoned. Haimendorf, C., von Furher, *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad*, p. 123ff. The Khond/Kui among the Gonds have a subsect called Konjaka which means a monkey. Among other groups of central India, the Baiga offshoot called Binjhwar at Chattisgarh have totemic sects of which one is the Kok/Lodha, the monkey. Ferreira, J. V., *Totemism in India* (Bombay, 1965), pp. 149, 152. A number of Munda, Oraon and Santhal tribes claim a monkey *gotra*. The Bhuiyan tribe of Singbhum call themselves Pavan-vamsa and claim descent from Hanuman. Some Oraons claim descent from Rāvaṇa. The *ṛkṣasūcaka*, bear-gotra is also common among certain tribes of the region. C. Bulcke, *Rāmakathā*, p. 118ff. This would certainly endorse the statement of the *Paumacariyam* that the *vānaras* were not actually monkeys but humans who had the monkey as their emblem. There is a village called Añjana in Chota Nagpur with remains of an early mound as yet unexcavated and local tradition claims that it is the birthplace of Hanumān.

Any study in parallels would not mean a simple matter of equating the *rākṣasas* and *vānaras* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* with the Gonds and other tribes of central India and identifying the *Rāma-kathā* with the victory of the Aryans over the Dravidians. It is unlikely that this was the content and purpose of the original story or for that matter even of later versions. A large set of relationships within the society and mythology of this area would have to be examined to test whether fragments from this area were incorporated into the *Rāmāyaṇa* or for that matter whether certain structural links, as for example, the bard-patron link, were introduced into the larger story. Such a study might have great significance in highlighting those facets of the Indian tradition which originated in areas of 'exile'.

96. Kosambi, D. D., *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, (Bombay, 1956), p. 40. Chanana, *The Spread of Agriculture in Northern India*.
97. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* I. 13. For a discussion of this myth see Thapar, R., 'Origin Myths and the Early Indian Historical Tradition' in Chattopadhyaya, D., (ed.), *History and Society* (Calcutta, 1978), pp. 281–2. See chapter 8 in volume III.
98. This might in part explain the change from a *gaṇa-saṅgha* system to monarchy or vice versa, as for example in the case of Videha.
99. *Artha-śāstra* XI. 1.
100. The Thirteenth Major Rock Edict. Bloch, J., *Les Inscriptions d' Asoka* (Paris, 1950), p. 129.
101. The Allahabad *praśasti*. Fleet, J. F., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III (Varanasi, 1970), the inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings, p. 6ff ... *paricārakīkrita-sarva-aṭavika-rajasya* ... Goyal, S. R., *A History of the Imperial Guptas* (Allahabad, 1967), pp. 130–1.
102. Such as the *rājasūya*, *vājapeya*, etc. More specifically, the *hiranyagarbha* symbolised rebirth via the golden womb to *kṣatriya* status and kingship. *Agni Purāṇa* 209–10; *Matsya Purāna* 274–89; *Liṅga Purāṇa* II. 28.
103. Romila Thapar, *op. cit* 'Origin Myths and the Early Indian Historical Tradition'. A number of dynasties associated themselves with the Ikṣvākus; the third century AD dynasty of southern Andhra, the Pāla kings as set out in Sandhyākaranandī's *Rāmacarita*, the Chāhamānas as described in Jayānaka's *Prithvirāja-vijaya*, the Pratihāras who refer to themselves as such in their inscriptions and various Rajput dynasties such as the Sisodias.
104. Thapar R., 'Renunciation: The making of a counter culture?' in Jagadeesan, N., and Jeyapragasam, S., *Homage to a Historian* (Madurai, 1976), Section II, p. 1ff. See chapter 6 in this volume.
105. *Sītā* meaning a furrow had evidently to do with an agricultural deity which is emphasised by Janaka her 'father' being called Sīradhvaja. This had its precedents and parallels in Vedic literature, *Ṛgveda* IV. 57.6. and especially in the Sīrayuñjanti mantra, *Atharvaveda* III. 17. recited when the furrows are sprinkled with water prior to the sanctification of the ground for a *yajña*. Sītā's relation with Janaka varies with each tradition. She is either found by him or is born in a furrow, or she is fashioned by Tvaṣṭri the celestial artisan

(*Mahābhārata*, Vana parva III. 147), or she is Rāvaṇa's daughter adopted by Janaka or is Rāma's sister or wife. Her association with the furrow is not exclusively that of an agricultural deity. The furrow is a universal symbol of the female genitalia and this would indicate a fertility goddess as well. The acceptance and the rejection of Sītā has to do with attitudes to both agricultural and fertility deities.

It is not without significance that in the structure of the *Rāmāyaṇa* the link in each of the major episodes involves the actions of Sītā. She is born in a furrow which makes her distinctively different from an ordinary human, she marries Rāma but only after he has performed the feat of breaking the bow, she follows him to the forest and is therefore crucial to the linking up of the kingdom with the forest; she is kidnapped by Rāvaṇa, her place of concealment is discovered by Hanumān, she is rescued by Rāma and is ultimately exiled and taken back to the earth from which she sprang: a complete cycle of biography. The removal of Sītā from the story would reduce it to a series of episodes in which none of the other characters play such a central and connective role. There is only one version of the *Rāma-kathā* in which Sītā is omitted and that is the *Daśaratha-kathānam* and it is a poor version of the story. Raghuvira and Yamamoto, *The Rāmāyaṇa in China*, p. 27.

The ultimate exile of Sītā is at one level an expression of the growing observance of the laws of chastity for women in which any connection with a man other than the husband is regarded with suspicion. One can justifiably regard this as part of the lowering of the status of women. At another level it may indicate the symbolical expulsion of the primitive goddess of fertility and the subordination of the agricultural goddess to the male agricultural deity subsumed in the all-enveloping powers of Viṣṇu. Sītā is a female fertility goddess in Vedic literature. She becomes the consort of Viṣṇu/Rāma which is consistent with the elevating of such goddesses to consort status. She has to be both goddess and yet of royal connections so as to ensure her marriage to the deity/hero, hence her adoption by Janaka. In many parts of India the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are enacted or observed at the same time as the major festival of Devi/Durgā. The Rāma-lilā appears to be limited to the Hindi-speaking areas and seems to have developed after the composition of Tulsidas's *Rāmacaritamānas*, Hein, N., *The Miracle Plays of Mathura*, (Delhi, 1972) p. 70ff. Did the *Rāmāyaṇa* oust the worship of Devī? Does the role of Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* symbolise the fate of Devī, in that Sītā is adopted, marries Rāma signifying the joining of Devī worship and Vaiṣṇavism, the kidnapping of Sītā represents the forcible loss of Devī, the *agni-parīkṣā* is the testing of Devī, and the ultimate exile of Sītā is the exile of the fertility goddess who is substituted by the worship of the male god.

A possible clue to this is contained in a part of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which is obviously of a later period and has been rejected by the editors of the Critical Edition. One of the attributes of Viṣṇu is that he is a solar deity and until such time as the solar cult grew in importance, Viṣṇu included within himself the powers of a solar deity. This is further emphasised by the solar symbolism of the genealogy, Sūryavaṃśa. The traditional mother goddess and the goddess of fertility had gradually to take a subordinate position and even be exiled; although the resistance of this deity to exile was to prove quite substantial and ultimately in worship she is reinstated as a consort. The existence of sun-worshippers is mentioned in the earlier versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, II. 95.7. The *ādityahṛdaya* hymn, VI. 105ff in the Bombay edition, in praise of the solar deity and which is meant to act as a talisman ensuring Rāma success against Rāvaṇa. is a later addition, and is given as Appendix I no. 65 in the C.E. VI.

106. The source of the lucrative supply of agate and carnelian was the Vindhyan forest region as is evident from *Ptolemy* 66 and the *Periplus* 49, (W. Scoff's ed. p. 193).
107. Kosambi, D. D., *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India* (London, 1965), p. 122.
108. Sharma, R. S., *Indian Feudalism* (Calcutta, 1965); *Social Changes in Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1969); Yadava, B. N. S., *Society and Culture in Northern India* (Allahabad, 1973).
109. Jaiswal, S., *The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism* (Delhi, 1967), p. 118ff.
110. Such as the *Yoga-vasiṣṭha-mahārāmāyaṇa*, the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*, and the *Adbhuta-rāmāyaṇa*. Grierson, G. A., 'On the Adbhuta Ramayana', *BSOAS*, 1926–28, IV. pp. 11–27. The fact that the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* was called the *Adbhuta-ottara-kāṇḍa* and was regarded as the eighth *kāṇḍa* of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* suggests that additions to the *Rāmāyaṇa* were regarded as normal. It has been argued with some justification that it was these late developments which influenced the *Rāmacaritamānas* together with a strong admixture of folk elements, Vaudeville, C., *Étude sur les sources et la composition du Ramayana de Tulsi-das* (Paris, 1955).
111. The Telegu *Raghunātha* of the thirteenth century; the Assamese Mādhava Kandali *Rāmāyaṇa* of the fourteenth century; the Bengali *Krittibāsa* of the fifteenth century; the Oriya *Bāla-rāmāyaṇa* of the fifteenth century; the Kannada *Torāve Rāmāyaṇa* of the sixteenth century; the Malayalam *Attiyatuma Rāmāyaṇa* of the sixteenth century and many others. Most of the studies carried out so far stress the similarities between the late *Rāmāyaṇas* and the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. It would be historically interesting to sift the differences and analyse them in a historical context.

112. Neog, M., 'Assamese Literature Before Śankaradeva', in Kakati, B. K., *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, Gauhati, 1959, p. 23ff. Neog, M., *Śankaradeva and His Times* (Gauhati, 1965).
113. Sarma, S. N., *The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam* (Gauhati, 1966).
114. The interaction of the Sanskritic and local traditions is also seen in the versions of the story which come from cultures outside India but which had close links with India. The *Sītāharana* episode occurs in Śri Lankā as part of the Kohomba Kankariya cult which has a healing ritual. Godakumbura, C. E., 'The Ramayana', *JRAS*, 1946,. Nos. 1 and 2, pp. 14–22; 'The Cult of Kohomba or the Three sons of Sita', *JRAS*, 1946, Nos. 3 and 4, pp. 185–191.

In the ninth century AD some episodes of the *Rāma-kathā* were included in Tibetan texts, presumably adapted from Chinese translations of the *Jātakas* and other stories. Thomas W., 'A Ramayana story in Tibetan from Chinese Turkestan' *Indian Studies: C. R. Lanman Commemoration Volume*, 1929, pp. 193–212. In one version Sītā is the daughter of Rāvaṇa but on the prediction that she will be the cause of the death of her father, she is thrown into the sea and brought up by foster parents.

In a Khotanese text (Bailey H. W., 'Rama' *BSOAS*, 1940–42, Vol. X, pp. 365–376, 559) Sītā is said to be the daughter of Daśagrīva and is abandoned when it is predicted that she will be the cause of her father's death. She is found by Rāma and his brother who jointly take her and place her in a magic circle, suggesting hereby that she was married to both brothers. This, in a area where fraternal polyandry was familiar would be quite expected.

Among the early versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in south east Asia is the seventh century stone inscription at Champa where a part of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* is inscribed in the proximity of a Vālmīki temple. There are interesting references to contemporary events such as the hostility between Champa and Annam to which attention is drawn through the description of the Rāma–Rāvana conflict. Huber, E., 'Legende de Rāma en Annam', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise de l' Extreme Orient*, V, 1950, p. 168ff. Ninth century reliefs at Prambanam in central Java and later sculpture at Panataram in east Java depict episodes from the story. The Javanese version of *Serat Rama* seems to draw on the Vālmīki version as well as the *Bhattikāvya* and other texts. Kats, J., 'The Ramayana in Indonesia', *BSOAS*, 1926–28, IV, pp. 579–85. Desai, S. N., 'Ramayana—An Instrument of Historical Contact and Cultural Transmission between India and Asia', *Journal of Asian Studies*, November 1970, XXX, No. 1, pp. 5–20. The later *Serat Kāṇḍa* draws on Islamic legends as well. The prophet (Nabi) Adam comes into the story.

Familiarity with the *Rāmāyaṇa* is evident in Cambodia in the sculptures at Angkor Vat and Ba Puon. Przyluski, J., 'La Legende de Rama sur les bas-reliefs d'Angkor Wat', *Ars et Archaeologie Khmers*, Paris, 1923. Thailand also subscribed to this tradition in that the capital was called Ayuthia, but the literature incorporating *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes is late. Laos includes the early episodes of the *Rāmāyana* under the title of the tale of Daśratha and the kidnapping of Sītā and the tale of Rāma. The *Rāma Jātaka* composed in a Buddhist framework has similarities with the Thai *Rāmakīrti* and the Malayan *Hikāyat Seri Ram*. Nivat, Dhani, 'The Rama Jataka, a Lao version of the story of Rama' *Journal of the Siam Society*, XXXVI, 1946, No. 1, p. 1ff.

A Buddhist version of the story is available in the text entitled, *Gvāy Dvorahbī*. Sahai, S., *Ramayana in Laos*, Delhi, 1976. The three lineages that of Ayodhyā, Kiṣkindhā and Lankā are said to have a common ancestor and the names are barely recognisable. Brother–sister marriages occur, echoing the *Daśaratha Jātaka*. Sītā is entrusted to the care of the Earth Goddess. The events are substantially different from those in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The opening invocation is Buddhist and the influence of Buddhist motifs is quite apparent. At a more subtle level the important role of Indra/Śakra at crucial points of the story and his friendly interventions are more Buddhist in feeling since Śakra is respected in the Buddhist tradition. We are told that Rāvaṇa impersonates Indra and seduces his wife Sujātā: a curious reversal of the Ahalya theme. She decided on revenge and is born as Rāvaṇa's daughter Sītā who is cast adrift because of the prophecy that she will be the cause of her father's death. This explains Indra's assistance to Sītā at various points in the story. The implicit father–daughter relationship in the kidnapping of Sītā by Rāvaṇa is strikingly different from the Vālmīki version.

The fifteenth century Malay version, the *Hikāyat Seri Ram* draws on the Javanese *Serat Kanda*, a number of folk versions such as the *Hikāyat Maharaja Ravana* and a number of Muslim legends. Winstedt, R. O., 'An Undescribed Malay version of the Ramayana', *JRAS*, 1944, pp. 62–78. Overbeck, H., 'Hikayat Maharaja Ravana', *JRAS* Malayan Branch 1933, XI, Pt. ii. Here again local names, places and events intrude into the story and change it quite considerably.

It would seem that the *Rāmāyaṇa* story had travelled to southeast Asia in the early first millennium AD and was part of the cultural surround of the court circles. Evidently the Buddhist and Jaina versions were also known. In the process of acculturation many folk elements were introduced which changed the original. What is interesting is not how much of the original survived but what were the innovations in the new environment, and why were they made? This would be a worthwhile study in the semiotics of the culture of this region.

115. This theory was first put forward in the nineteenth century by Christian Lassen in *Indische Alterthumskunde* (Leipzig 1847–1862), II, p. 535, and in spite of more recent research on the subject remains a popular notion.

11

Perceiving the Forest

Early India

This essay explores a theme which Günther-Dietz Sontheimer had drawn attention to in his writings, namely the relationship of the forest to the settlement—the *vana* to the *kṣetra*. These could be opposing concepts contrasting the habitat of the ascetic and the renouncer on the one hand, and the established settlement reflecting attempts at a regularly ordered social system, on the other. Or, in some cases, they could be seen as a continuum. The *grāma* (which would fall under the category of 'settlement') was not static, and could include a mobile village or migrating cattle keepers, the emphasis in both being on large numbers of people and domestic animals. The dichotomy as well as the complementarity between the forest and the settlement has often been commented upon. Sontheimer was interested in the application of this duality to historical processes, especially to the construction of religious articulations such as the parallels between tribal fertility cults and Tantricism or the Devi cults, as also in the relationship of this duality to pastoralism.[1] His study of pastoral activities led him to suggest a link between the forest and the settlement, and to attempt to understand the influences on the responses of the *ksetra* or *grāma* to the *vana* or *āraṇya*.

This dichotomy between the *vana* and the *grāma* evolved in early times when the village constituted the settlement. With the emergence of urban centres, and particularly in the early centuries AD, there was also a growing dichotomy between the *grāma* and the *nagara*—the village and the town respectively. At the same time, *vana* and *āraṇya* had an ecology different from that of the settlement, and would have included the desert and the semi-arid pastoral regions as well. Another dichotomy, discussed in the context of ecology and medical knowledge, was that of the *jāṅgala* and the *ānūpa*—the forest and the marshland.[2] This had a stronger ecological connotation than *vana* and *kṣetra*. There is also the well-known concept of *tiṇai* as set out in Śangam literature, listing five ecological zones. The definition of *vana* and *kṣetra* and the distinction between them gradually absorbed a variety of connotations which enriched the concepts and extended their meaning to well beyond ecology.

I would like to argue that although the duality has existed for many centuries, the perceptions accompanying it were neither static nor uniform. The forest was seen in multiple ways, and historical change altered the focus. Where it was romanticized it became an imagined alternative, a fictive paradise, which expunged the inequities of civilized living. Alternatively, it was seen as the fearful habitat of demons.[3] Both the romanticism and the demons are found in texts and in folk literature. But the images change, as do their roles. In folk versions, the images are often the reverse of those in texts, and one has to ask why this is so. Where the literary tradition is the only source, the perspective is inevitably of the *grāma*. This is one of many reasons why the collecting of oral traditions is crucial to obtaining a view from the other side. When the demands of civilization begin to impinge on the forest, the perceptions of the forest and its people also change. The forest, therefore, is not a neutral item, that is 'out there'. The images it evokes are significant to the self-understanding of the settlement and these change with time and with intention.

Ideologies focusing on retreat into the wilderness seem to have germinated in the agro-pastoral society referred to in the Vedic corpus but came to fruition in the discussions which took place in urban centres, which ironically could only be established through clearing the forest. Here, in the *kutūhalaśālās*, parks and recreational places on the fringes of towns, people gathered to hear heterodox thinkers—the Buddha and others—who initiated various new ideologies. Such parks or groves became yet another liminal space between the forest retreats eulogized in the Vedic corpus and the variant philosophical concerns associated with a context of nascent urbanization. Even when the monastic system came to be established, despite the necessity of dependence on alms which linked the monasteries to the *grāma*, the ideal image remained that of monks in forest monasteries. In the Deccan, the early monasteries at nodal points in the Western Ghats were clustered around caves, some natural and some deliberately cut into the volcanic rock. This did not require extensive forest clearance as did the monasteries on the plateau.

Some years ago Charles Malamoud argued for a dividing line between the *grāma* and the *āraṇya* and linked it to Vedic ideology.[4] He maintained that these were not merely spatial differences. Stability in the *grāma* grew out of the cohesion of the group rather than the limitation of space and was maintained by *dharma*, social rules within a world-order encapsulated in the ritual of sacrifice. The *āraṇya*, by definition, lacked the cohesion of the *grāma*, for not only was it spatially more extensive, but was also the habitat of those who did not live by *dharma*, such as brigands and thieves. The *āraṇya* is any wilderness, it is interstitial, empty and constitutes 'the other'. Yet, the forest is part of the *āraṇya* even though it is not empty space. Whatever is not included in the settlement belongs to the forest. The forest is, thus, not only the space between settlements but is characterized by being strange, remote, wild and different. It teems with creatures but their appearance and behaviour is unpredictable. Malamoud also remarks that all beings belong to either one or the other, but only man has access to both.

Some scholars have made a further distinction between the two categories. *Grāma* and *āraṇya*, as more widely inclusive terms, are seen as dichotomous; whereas *vana* and *kṣetra*, being more specific, are viewed as interactive or even as a continuum. The dichotomy is also suggested by the statement in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* that the sacrificial animal at the *yajña* should be from the *grāma*, for while a domesticated animal eliminates the undesirable, the sacrificing of a wild animal from the forest has a negative effect.[5] The performance of a *yajña* is linked inherently to the *grāma*. Village animals can, however, graze in the forest, and pasture lands are frequently seen as a category between the two.[6] The two complementary ways of obtaining meat for eating were hunting and the sacrifice.[7] The meat from hunting was obtained in a non-ritual context, and since it came from the *vana*, no controls were required. The meat from the ritual of sacrifice was generally that of a prized animal and was, therefore, infrequently available. Hence Yajñavalkya's pleasure at eating a tender cut of beef.[8]

The notion of dichotomy is also extended to the major opposition in societal terms, that of the *gṛhastha* (householder) and the *saṁnyāsin* (ascetic or renouncer). The householder has to observe the social obligations of the *grāma* and of *dharma*, and has a schedule of daily rites, but the renouncer living in the forest is free of these.[9] The logic of the duality was that he who had renounced the practice of social and sacred obligations would have the forest as his habitat, since the forest did not require these. The eventual crystallization of these ideas was the theory of the four stages of life—the four *āśramas*—where, interestingly, a major part of one's life was to be spent, one way or another, in the forest. Perhaps this was a compromise with the demands of monastic life encouraged by Buddhism and Jainism, and urged on the renouncer even from a young age.

Epic literature is among the early compositions which plays on the dichotomy and the complementarity of the *vana* and *kṣetra*, but it also tends to change the orientation somewhat from that of the Vedic corpus. Many forests are mentioned, each by name, suggesting that the forest was not an undifferentiated expanse but had its own categories of identity.[10] In early India, the forest was the context for at least three activities: the hunt, the hermitage, and the place of exile. The descriptions of the hunts of the *rājās* in the *Mahābhārata* have a ferocity which can only be described as their being a surrogate raid on nature. The narrative of Śakuntalā for example, opens with Duḥṣanta hunting in the forest.[11] He has a large entourage of heavily armed soldiers and hundreds of horses and elephants, as if going into battle. The *vana* was the unknown territory, peopled by *rākṣasas*. Here the hero slaughtered indiscriminately. Families of tigers and deer were killed, and severely wounded elephants trampled the forest. So fierce was the slaughter of animals that predators and prey took refuge together. One is reminded of another vivid description of the destruction of a forest—the Khāṇḍava *vana* burnt by Agni.[12] The fire raged for days and ate everything that came in its way. The heroes were presented with stunningly splendid weapons and the massacre began. Not only did animals and birds lose their lives, but the *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas* and *nāgas*, all were sought to be killed. Were these the reflections of a vivid mythology, or was this a veiled allusion to the people of the forest? So great was the carnage that even the gods asked whether the moment of *mahāpralaya*—the ultimate destruction of the universe—had arrived. The land was devastated, but cleared of forest, and the settlement of Indraprastha and the chiefdom of the Pāṇḍavas established. Both the ferocity of the hunt and the burning of the forest were necessary preconditions for power, and not just in a symbolic sense.

It is ironic that the burning of forests by Agni is described in the earliest literary source, yet Agni itself is born through the friction of wood.[13] It has been argued that the burning of forests was an attempt to destroy the resource base of hunter-gatherers even if forested land was easily available.[14] Or was it an attempt to clear more land in the vicinity of over-populated areas? The burning of the Khāṇḍava *vana* as necessary for establishing Indraprastha suggests the idea of staking a claim on the land as territory. This burning has been viewed as a massive *yajña* for Agni. It is different in intention from Videgha Māthava carrying Agni in his mouth across the Sadānīra/Gandak, possibly to legitimize his settlement.[15] The mood of the two narratives is dissimilar.

In a society of chiefships, where the state had not yet come into being and relationships within and between clans were dominant, claims to territory were made or reiterated more frequently through a raid or through the hunt—the surrogate raid. Even the notion of conquest tended often to be associated with rituals performed on special occasions, such as the *dig-vijaya* required prior to a *yajña*, and even then there is some uncertainty about the exact nature of 'conquest'. In each of the epics, the war that was pivotal to the events was not essentially motivated by the wish to control further territory but by the insistence on the recognition of rights. The hunt was also a mechanism of asserting control over grazing grounds. When the keeping of large herds became the main resource for a clan, then access to grazing grounds became a basic necessity that the chief of the clan had to provide and defend. Domesticated animals grazed outside the village and in the periphery of the forest and had to be protected.[16] A fine example of these links occurs in the *ghoṣa-yātra*, the cattle foray described in the *Mahābhārata*. The Kuru clan, in fact, had to brand its herds. The younger members of the clan, together with their friends, women and retainers, their horses, soldiers and huntsmen, took the cattle to the Dvaitavana forest for grazing, where the animals were counted and the calves branded. The forest was an established grazing ground with huts for the cowherds, and the inspecting of cattle became the excuse for a hunt. That it was tied to claiming territory and the legitimacy of the Kurus to rule, is evident from the initial intention to use it as an occasion to attack the Pāṇḍavas. The entourage, apart from the townspeople, is said to have consisted of 8,000 chariots, 9,000 horses, 30,000 elephants and several thousand foot soldiers, as well as carts, traders, prostitutes and thousands of hunters. This, clearly, is an exaggeration, meant undoubtedly to emphasize the power of those taking the offensive. The forest was seemingly close by, so that people could return daily to the settlement. The distribution of gifts on this occasion was lavish, and is another indicator of the status of the Kuru clan. This is followed almost immediately by an altercation with the *gandharvas* over rights to the interior of the forest, which leads to a battle in which the Kurus were eventually defeated.[17] Cattle raids and claims over forest lands were essential to chiefdoms. The *gandharvas* in this narrative have an ambiguous identity, for they are likely to have been forest dwellers rather than celestial beings.

Hunting as the activity of chiefs and later of kings was looked upon as an enviable expertise, and the hero's success was measured by his prowess in the hunt. Yet those forest peoples who lived by hunting—the Vyādha, Niṣāda, and such like—are regarded with contempt, treated as uncouth and sinful, and subordinated to a low-caste status. Ostensibly the explanation for this was that they lived by violence and were devoid of the values of the *grāma*. But more likely, the downgrading was intended to uphold the legitimacy of the royal hunt. The conflict with such groups was constant, as is mentioned in the narrative of Śakuntalā in the *Mahābhārata*. We tend to forget that for hunter-gatherer societies, claims to forests as hunting grounds and the association of particular groups with these claims, continued even after such societies ceased to be dependent on hunting. From the perspective of the *grāma*, if the forest was seen as the chaotic unknown, the king had to conquer it and refashion the chaos into order.[18]

The hunt introduces us to the forest dwellers. These tended to be either creatures of the imagination such as the *rākṣasas* who are abundant, or else humans with supernatural faculties. *Rākṣasas* have generally been described as demons and as unreal. But given the perceptions of the forest in the epics, they are as likely to be the unfamiliar forest dwellers who obstructed hunting expeditions and harassed those establishing settlements in the forest, for example, *ṛṣis* establishing *āśramas*. Or are they societies contrasted with monarchy, such as the more sophisticated *rākṣasas* of the *Rāmāyana*? Moreover, is the hunt also an aspect of the subordination of nature to culture? If the forest is seen as a place which is without order or discipline, then it is required of the *rājā* to control it and the hunt becomes the beginning of such control, even if it is initially chaotic. This subordination was also achieved, perhaps less traumatically, through the setting up of *āśramas* in the forest. In the narrative of Śakuntalā, the ferocity of the hunt is contrasted with the gentle calm of the hermitage, each presenting a different view of nature. The hermitage is set so deep in the forest that it is almost another world, enveloped in a translucent green of sun and trees. This is liminal space, the threshold between the two contrasting ecologies of the *vana* and the *kṣetra*. But at the same time it may be seen as a precursor of what later evolved into *agrahāras*—grants of land to *brāhmaṇas*, either in forests or wastelands, or grants of cultivated land. The *āśrama* is at one level an intrusion into the forest by the people of the *grāma*, an intrusion sought to be stemmed by those living in the forest. Not unexpectedly, the literature is replete with references to *āśramas* being attacked by *rākṣasas* and heroes being requested to repel these attacks. The predators are more often demons rather than wild animals. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa begin their apprenticeship as heroes by defending *ṛṣis* against *rākṣasas*.

The hermitage may have been the vanguard of the encroachment into the forest. But at the same time the choice of the forest, and the symbolic act of going to the forest for purposes of asceticism and renunciation has multiple meanings: there is a distancing from civilization; a seeking of knowledge through isolation and meditation: and a search for the meaning of life through experiencing the unknown. This emphasis on the solitary individual was entirely different from the social interlocking which the clan required for the performance of sacrificial rituals. There is meant to be an underlying sense of release in going to the forest and a heightening of the feeling of anomie. The early *Upaniṣads* use the dichotomy to differentiate the path of the soul where rebirth is associated with the *grāma* but self-realization in the forest ensures a release from rebirth.[19] The movement away from sacrificial ritual invests the retreat in the forest with a different kind of power. The origin of hermitages is not very clear. The preferred choice was a place distant from the settlement so that there would be few intrusions, which is ironic, since the hermitage itself was an intrusion. Its way of life was a denial of that associated with the settlement. Renouncers having renounced social obligations, had to live where such obligations and duties were not required. Rituals were performed, but only for the members of the *āśrama*. Food was gathered from what the forest provided and cultivation was marginal. The attempt was to live in unison with the rhythms of the forest world, even if not in amity with the forest people.

The suggestion for a hermitage could have come from the existing sacred groves, located either on the peripheries, or in the dense areas of the forest. The former would be tended by the settlement and the latter by the forest dwellers. A small forest was dedicated to a deity, was left uncut, and had a space for offerings and activities demanded by rituals focusing sometimes on a shrine located in the grove. This would have been consistent with the way in which forest dwellers looked upon forests—as a source of nurture and a territory for sustenance, an appreciation which continues into later times and forms. The Buddha is often said to have been born in a grove of Sāla trees. For Kālidāsa, the *āśrama* of Kaṇva is a *tapovana*, suggesting a sacred grove.[20] Sacred groves may even have been specially planted since the trees are sometimes specified, and believed to be sacred to particular deities. The protection of the grove was sought by barring entry except on certain occasions. Those infringing the prohibition suffered dire consequences, sometimes as extreme as a change of sex as in one version of the well-known story of Ila/Iḷā. The normal activity of hunting associated with the forest was often forbidden in the grove. Although the large numbers of groves are commented upon even as recently as the nineteenth century, those in the interior of forests had a better chance of survival than the ones on the periphery. The association with deities afforded only limited protection; when the encroachment came, accompanied by the gods and goddesses of Hinduism, the existing deities would have been subsumed.

The forest was never far away from habitation. For instance, excavations of the settlements at Atranjikhera and Hastinapur, which are not too far from Delhi, have yielded evidence of a large variety of forest trees.[21] The Buddhist Canon states that aside from the village and its outskirts, the rest of the land is jungle.[22] Even as late as the seventh century A.D., the Chinese Buddhist monk Hsüan Tsang writes of forests close to Kauśāmbi, as also of the extensively forested areas in the vicinity of Kapilavastu and Kuśinagara in the *terai* and north Bihar.[23] Travelling from one town to another meant going through a forest. Therefore, when in exile, the forest was not a physically distant place, although distant in concept. The exile of heroes in both epics is to the forest. But here the forest takes on a different connotation and is not merely the jungle beyond the settlement. The forest, as the location of the unknown, and the place of exile, became an exploration. It was also necessary to the continuation of the narrative of the epic. Exile was a device used commonly by bards and poets to stretch the story. The forest was where anything could happen and in each retelling of the story or even in each day of the recitation, fresh incidents could be added. The heroes in exile entered the unknown, unpredictable space, where events had strange consequences, for the hierarchies and regulations of the *grāma* were not observed. Exile, thus, became an experience in forging and testing human values.

Every epic has an imagined space which is crucial to the imagery created for the audience and which is then sought to be projected as a reality. This central space signalled the presence of people whose appearance and customs could be alien, and these were viewed either as worth emulating or were rejected through contempt or fear. The space, however, was an extension in the imagination of a geographical reality. In the Indian epics, it was the forest that constituted this imagined space. By way of contrast, the Greek hero Ulysses was tossed into a similar space after the battle of Troy, although for the essentially sea-faring Greeks, this was what Homer describes as the wine-dark seas. The journey from Troy to Ithaca which would at most have taken a few days across the Aegean Sea, took many years, with Ulysses' ships being driven ashore at various places along the Mediterranean. This provided Homer and the bards with opportunities for introducing exotic men and women, part fantasy, part mythology and in part the mirror which 'the other' presents to the self. Those conjured up in these spaces of the unknown are either contrary to or else ideal projections of the society of the poet.

Such imagined space can, up to a point, be given some geographical location and be used to encourage the cultural appropriation, if not the political subordination, of new areas coming within the ambit of a dominant culture. Associations are sought between the culture of the heroes and that of the people in this space. This often takes the form of myths or expressions of local culture which insist that the heroes had visited a particular region; hence the frequency of the Pāṇḍu *lenas* and the Sītā *kunds* all over the subcontinent. When some epics are later converted to sacred literature, as the Indian epics were, then this space becomes a matter of sacred geography and there is an even greater insistence on the association of people, deities and location.

If the *āśrama* was a place of penance and purification for the ascetic, the forest provided the same context for aspiring heroes. The hunting and gathering life which they are forced to adopt is a reversal of the life they were born to, but is projected as idyllic and free from the complexities of their normal existence. The heroes bring with them the awareness of social obligations but, as long as they are in the forest, they are permitted to question or even discard these. If this period is as it has been described—'the liminal context for spiritual transformation'[24]—then it becomes a threshold condition which prepares them for the eventual denouement. The forest becomes a metaphor for change, subsequent experiences being coloured by the exile in the forest.

Among the most romantic images of the forest are those which occur in the plays of Kālidāsa, as in the *Abhijñāna-śākuntalam*. This takes us into a different perception of the forest. The duality of settlement and forest is apparent in the contrasting images of the *āśrama* of the *ṛṣi* Kaṇva and the court of Duḥṣanta at Hastināpur. Śakuntalā is essentially a woman of the forest and Duḥṣanta a man of the court, suggesting again the bifurcation of nature and culture. It has been argued that patriarchal ideologies project 'nature' as feminized and 'culture' as masculine, where nature is passive and culture authoritative.[25] But the counter argument maintains that notions of nature relate to specific conditions and that association of gender with culture varies in different situations.[26] The distancing between the *āśrama* and the court is made explicit in Kālidāsa's play through the comments of the two acolytes from the *āśrama* who accompanied Śakuntalā. Their discomfort is expressed in the feeling that the palace is as if on fire, and the town mired in filth. However, the *āśrama* was not unfamiliar with the ways of the world. Kaṇva knows the mores of upper-caste society and his advice to his foster daughter draws on the axioms appropriate to proper wifely behaviour in a patriarchal society. The play also touches subconsciously on the different kinds of authority invested in the *ṛṣi* and the *rājā*. The *ṛṣi* opts out of social obligations and establishes an alternative pattern of life where such obligations have no role. His power is drawn from his individually practised asceticism, in isolation in the forest, and this power can even threaten the gods. The *rājā* upholds social obligations and protects the *varṇāśramadharma*, believing that the equilibrium of society is thereby maintained. Unlike the *ṛṣi*, he draws his powers from interaction with others, and through governance and various coercive agencies. Yet, his power does not allow him to compete with the gods.

Kalidāsa's play registers a change in the three characteristics related to the forest that I have associated with the epics, and to that extent captures a historical moment which is in some ways transitional to later perceptions of the forest. The opening scene is a less gruesome hunt than in the epic. There is even an elegant verse on the fleeing deer chased by the king in his chariot. The hunt is neither a surrogate raid nor a claim to territory, for these are now achieved more effectively through campaigns and battles. The hunt is a royal pastime infused with the axioms of gallantry. On arriving at the *āśrama*, the king removes his royal regalia and enters as an ordinary man. *Āśramas* are now protected by kings, although at the same time they claim to be outside royal jurisdiction. Protection is largely against *rākṣasas*, *pretas*, and *daityas*, all creatures conjured up as poetic fancy. It is, however, equally likely that they are projections of forest people resisting encroachment, who are, therefore, fantasized as demons in order to legitimize their extermination. It is not easy to separate poetic imagery and political reality, but the former can provide a momentary glimpse of the latter. As already noted, the relationship of the *āśrama* with the state is a precursor of a greater interlocking in the instituting of the *agrahāras*—grants of land to *brāhmaṇas*—which become common from this time onwards. The activities in the *āśrama*, focusing on the study and recitation of the *Vedas*, would suggest that it was a support of a conservative nature for the king. The *āśrama* of Kaṇva in the play does not accommodate heterodox beliefs and practices. But being at the intersection of settlement and forest, it could and did sometimes link the knowledge systems of both, thus encouraging innovations.[27]

This change in attitudes to the forest, different in the play from perceptions in the *Mahābhārata*, hints at other changes in attitude towards the forest and its people. The forest was now less alien and at least on its margins was beginning to be looked upon almost as a variant of the *grāma*; it was slowly becoming the recipient of the discipline and norms associated with those regarded as civilized. Above all, it was being viewed as a resource to be exploited. The perception of the forest as viewed by those who were advisors and authorities of the state, such as Kauṭilya, is entirely unlike those discussed so far. This new perception did not replace what has been depicted so far, but offered a new and different perspective, reflecting the concerns of a different political entity, namely the state. At this juncture, the state took the form of a mature monarchy with a concentration of political power in a single person, drawing less on kinship loyalties for administrative functioning and more on an impersonal structure backed by coercive authority. Power and authority in the state system became dependent on revenue, among other things. Consequently the legitimate tapping of various sources of revenue was being suggested, and this included the forest.

For purposes of extending agriculture, both in order to bring in a larger revenue and perhaps to support a growing population, Kauṭilya's advice was to settle *śūdra* peasants on wasteland or land which had been deserted.[28] This meant some cutting of forests in order to clear the land. If the desertion of land was due to shifting cultivation this also required constant tree felling. Shifting cultivation permitted a secondary growth but settled cultivation assumed the permanent clearing away of the forest. The granting of tax-free, cultivable land to special categories of persons—learned *brāhmaṇas* and professionals working for the state—was also mentioned. This would either have been cultivated land in villages, or else larger acreages of uncultivated land to be brought under cultivation by the grantee. The latter would again mean some deforestation. The incidence of this creating what came to be called *agrahāras* can be traced to the early centuries of the Christian era when inscriptions attest to kings making such grants. The frequency increases in later times. Forests were also assessed as a source of revenue, both from their natural products such as timber, elephants, veins of semi-precious stones and mines, and through their transformation into cultivable land.[29] The clearing of forests had to be kept under firm control—not because Kauṭilya was an environmentalist, but because the state had to be watchful of both the production and the receipt of revenue. The state was also advised to take the initiative in developing forests, especially those featuring particular kinds of forest produce, and to settle people in forests who would be trained to garner this produce and to convert it into items for commerce.[30] Elephant forests were especially prized, for not only was the ivory valuable but it was also thought that victory in battle depended principally on the elephant wing of the army. Furthermore, such forests made excellent natural frontiers. That these activities of the state may have met with some opposition from forest dwellers is suggested by Kauṭilya's remark that the king should not tax those areas which had been laid waste by the *āṭavika*/forest dwellers.[31] What form this opposition took is not specified, but the exemption from tax for those cultivators affected by the activities of the forest people would suggest that perhaps the crops of the cultivators were burnt. He also cautions against forest chieftains who were numerous, visible, brave and could ruin a country. They could be allies or could be used politically to create trouble for neighbouring kingdoms.[32] Forest peoples—*āraṇyacāra ca āṭavika*—are a distinct category, known and visible, in the text.[33]

Many references to forest chiefs occur in the later sections of the book, dating to the early centuries A.D. In these later portions, too, forest chiefs are seen as potential allies or enemies or as instruments to be used politically to create trouble in neighbouring kingdoms. They are, therefore, depicted as part of the diplomacy of interstate relations.[34] Some are even said to have pillaged cities.[35] Attacks on caravans were commonly feared by traders, which led to some guilds maintaining their own militia for defence against such attacks.[36] The frequency of references to forest chiefs and forest peoples in the context of campaigns and of diplomacy would point to their being of greater importance than has been assumed by modern historiography. A hint in another source unexpectedly suggests much the same. The Mauryan emperor, Aśoka, ruling in the third century B.C., makes a curious statement in his Major Rock Edict XIII, the same edict in which he expresses remorse for the suffering caused by his campaign in Kalinga.[37] We are told that Devānaṃpiya conciliates the forest people, but warns them that he has power even in his remorse and asks them to repent lest they be killed. The reason for demanding their repentance, or for the threat to their lives, remains a mystery. Elsewhere he forbids the wanton burning of forests.[38] Was the threat to forest dwellers a way of preventing the illegal clearing of forests and of curbing shifting cultivation? Was Aśoka, being a conscientious Buddhist, trying to wean away the *āṭavikas* from a life of hunting and killing animals, or was the Mauryan state ensuring that its appropriation of forest produce would not be obstructed by forest dwellers? Or was the state protecting forest dwellers? There was at that time enough forested land for there to be no fear of the disappearance of forests. Shifting cultivation, therefore, may not have been viewed as a disaster, for it also permitted the growth of a secondary forest. Aśoka, it seems, took pride in having trees planted along the roads to provide shade for travellers. This was not a policy of forecasting treeless areas, though Pillar Edict V is much quoted by modern environmentalists arguing for his having been conscious of ecological damage. Aśoka lists those animals that were inviolate, and some were inviolate on particular days. The list is curious, including as it does creatures unlikely to be killed for food, which could suggest their use in medicine, and the mention of particular days links the edict to ritual practices rather than environmental concerns.

The stern policy of Aśoka Maurya towards the forest people takes a further turn under the Guptas. In the fourth century A.D. Samudragupta is said to have reduced the *āṭavika-rājās* or forest chiefs to servitude.[39] It is likely that the customary use of the forest by the *āṭavika-rājās* was based on privilege rather than on rights. Not only was the use of the forest by forest communities curtailed, but servitude would also have broken their clan or community identity. Further, the expansion of trade and the opening up of new areas to commercial exchange took routes cutting through forests. Forest dwellers had to be brought under control to safeguard these routes and the valuable resources of the forest. Brigands attacking travellers and merchants are a given in Indian history. It was not that the forest people were necessarily brigands but the forest provided shelter for brigandage. Where these areas were conquered, the *āṭavikas* would have been put to work to obtain resources. Centres for the collection of timber and the produce of mines meant further inroads into the forest.

The change in the agrarian economy brought about by grants of land from the Gupta period onwards has been analysed as an innovation in political economy. The impact of this change on the forest and those dwelling within needs further investigation. These are the people who would either have been forced to migrate deeper into the forest, or else, if they remained juxtaposed to the encroaching state system and the cultivation it brought, they would have been inducted into the *jāti* or caste structure. Those who were required to work the forest resources for a conquering state would have undergone a similar experience. Such new *jātis* would be identified by their having retained, to some degree, their kinship patterns and customs. This process has been described as the transition from tribe to caste, from *jana* to *jāti*, a conclusion which obscures the more fundamental transformation, namely, the emergence of a peasant society in erstwhile forest regions. This process would have integrated the deities of Hindu sects into the ritual and belief systems of the new *jātis*, as well as incorporated the cults of the forest into what we recognize as Hindu religions. The process of the transformation of *jana* to *jāti* goes back to earlier times, but given the availability of a larger body of diverse sources at this later time the process is more apparent. These were the less visible ways in which the *vana* entered the nodal points of the *grāma*. In such relationships, the definition of *vana* and *kṣetra* may also have implied the centrality of *jāti* stratification in the *kṣetra*.

Grants of land increased in number with the parallel increase in small states that were dependent on agriculture for revenue, on resources from the forest, and on commerce. Origin myths of local dynasties carry hints of connections with forest clans and some even provide an ancestry. This would suggest that grantees and adventurers may have married into the families of forest chieftains. As in all such interactions, what resulted was complex. However, this was not always a process of osmosis by which the *āṭavikas* were gently converted to a caste. Where deriving revenue from the forest was at issue, this could become a disjuncture in their lives. A group of inscriptions from Khoh in central India illustrates the process.[40]

In A.D. 475, a *mahārājā*, Hastin, ruling in Bundelkhand, is recorded as granting a village to a group of *brāhmaṇas*. The king's ancestry is described as being of a *nṛpati parivrājaka kula*, that is, of a kingly ascetic. This may point to an earlier connection with a grant of land for an ancestor—the *brāhmaṇa* Suśarman. If the grant was large enough to form a foundation for a dynasty, it must surely have included substantial areas of forest land, particularly in Bundelkhand. Twenty years later, another copper-plate inscription from Khoh, issued by the successor to Hastin, records a grant of land to a *brāhmaṇa*. The king claims that his ancestor was of the Bhāradvāja *gotra*, thus suggesting a *brahma-kṣatra* status, without actually saying so. He also claims as part of his inheritance eighteen *āṭavī rājyas* or forest kingdoms conquered by the family. This was part of the conversion of the Vindhyan region from forest to kingdom, from *vana* to *kṣetra*. This process needs to be investigated in assessing the transmutation of each, and in ascertaining where the change was an accommodation and where it was a contestation.

Some *brāhmaṇas* who received land grants were known to marry into the families of 'tribal' chiefs, as has been discussed by many scholars.[41] Such marriages were not only a mutual backing of status, albeit of two different systems, but were also used to lay claim to the territories traditionally associated with the clan of the chief.[42] This becomes something of a sub-continental pattern where land grants are common. The Pallavas, for example, claimed descent from a *brāhmaṇa* and a *nāga* woman.[43] This, however, did not result in a change of status of the *āṭavikas*. The initial contestation, frequently violent, gradually took the form of cultural and social incorporation and opened up possibilities through ritual and custom for the *āṭavika* practices to become part of Puranic Hinduism. Even more crucial are the ensuing political relations between aspirants to kingdoms and forest dwellers when the kingdom is established but the participation of the latter remains essential. State formation was not a simple, linear process exploiting the forest dweller. Although the exploitation cannot be denied, adjustments in other forms also had to be conceded by those who were exploiters. The multiplicity of goddesses and myths, and the emergence of new *jātis* is an indication of these changes.

This is not to suggest that the earlier attitude to the forest and its people was replaced by the new relationships. Many of the earlier attitudes persisted. Some were even romanticized since fresh encroachments into new forests continued to be those of the hermitage and the land grant. The coming of the state was subsequent. There is, therefore, even a certain superimposition of the images, with some more dominant than others. *Rākṣasas* and *apsarās* are less in the forefront in courtly literature than in folk narratives. Frequently, the latter relate a variant narrative which may not be a direct reversal of the classical version, but which, nevertheless, presents the story from a different perspective.

A century later, Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita* describes a forest in the Vindhyas where the king, Harṣa, goes in search of his sister.[44] What were once the perceptions of the forest in the epic, focusing on the hunt, the hermitage and exile, were now beginning to fade. Bāṇabhaṭṭa's description would pertain to the middle of the first millennium A.D. Villages in the forest as described by Bāṇabhaṭṭa are large and well stocked. In addition to cow pens there are rice paddies and sugarcane fields worked by farming families. Blacksmiths collect wood for charcoal, and hunters, trappers and fowlers are active. Others come with the produce of the forest—bark, cotton from the Simul tree, flax and hemp, honey, water lily roots, and wax—and women carry baskets of forest fruit to sell at the next village. This is, economically, a different scene from the forests of the epics, and *rākṣasas* and *apsarās* are far less frequent. Yet this is the same area of Vindhyan forest through which the epic heroes were said to have wandered in exile. The description in the *Harṣacarita* is not too dissimilar to that of Vimalasūri in the *Paumacariyam*—a Jaina version of the narrative of Rāma, where exile in the Vindhyas entails travelling through many more kingdoms, unlike in the Vālmīki version where there are more forests to be traversed. This description would pertain to the mid-first millennium A.D.[45]

And what of the forest people? The king Harṣa, travelling in the Vindhyan region, is introduced to the nephew of the Śabara chief.[46] He is described as dark with blood-shot eyes, a flat nose, a thick lower lip and projecting cheekbones, moving like a *tamāla* tree or a mass of black collyrium or a melting block of iron from the Vindhya. But it is said that he knew every leaf of the forest. The description carries echoes of the earlier descriptions of the Niṣāda, Bhilla, Pulinda and other forest peoples. In short, it appears to be a stereotype. Should it be taken as accurate? The stereotype, it seems, had entered mythology. Puranic myths about the first ruler emphasize the difference between the forest dweller and the cultivator.[47] The contempt of the *brāhmaṇas* for the first is contrasted with the eulogies for the second. Thus, when the *rājā*, Veṇa, began to oppose the *brāhmaṇas* and stopped performing sacrifices, they turned on him and killed him. Without a ruler there was chaos in the land, so in desperation they churned the left thigh of Veṇa. A short, ugly, dark man with a flat nose and blood-shot eyes emerged. He was thought to be unfit to rule, and was banished to the forest and given the name Niṣāda, meaning 'to sit' or 'to sink'. Nisāda, Bhilla, Pulinda and Śabara were to be generic names for those who lived in the forest. Subsequently, when the right arm of Veṇa was churned, there emerged the tall, handsome Pṛthu who introduced cattle rearing and agriculture. The ensuing prosperity so pleased the earth that she adopted his name and is hence called Pṛthivī. Implicit in this imagery is the opposition between the civilized and those belonging to the forest. The opposition was not new, for the description of Śabara resembles earlier descriptions of the *rākṣasa*, but the relationship has changed. The Śabara was neither feared nor allowed to forget that he had to be subservient. The myth encapsulates an opposition between the *vana* and the *kṣetra*.

And so the story continues for many centuries up to the present. There is a constant mingling of all these perceptions, but some either lie dormant or surface dramatically. The epics, for instance, continue to be recited, and their narratives have generated multiple and varying local versions in folk literature. Sometimes the imagery coincides with that of the hegemonic epic, but often, it is contrary to it and becomes a way of contesting the former. The Indian past provides us with multiple perceptions of the forest and those who live there. Perceptions and contexts alter over time. In many cases, we do not know who the original inhabitants of the forest may have been, for much of the present mythology speaks of migrations and the shuffling of peoples. It has now also begun to reflect the intertwining of the mythologies of forest and settlement. A juxtaposition of the images, those of the settlement and the self-images of the forest peoples, could encourage a dialogue on perceptions.

We cannot say that the Indian tradition insisted on the conservation of forests, or alternatively, that there was little comprehension of ecology and that forests were devastated. There were times when some forests were devastated, there were times when some were conserved, whatever the reason. But it would be illuminating to attempt to know the reason. What does, however, become apparent is that even on recognizing the dichotomy of the *vana* and the *kṣetra*, their complementarity immediately surfaces. The historical role, the historical interaction, and the imagery of the one is essential to the reconstruction of the other. In the absence of the one, the reality of the other is diminished.

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Notes

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7. Zimmerman, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats*, p.60.
8. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 3.1.2.21.
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31. *Arthaśāstra*, 2.1.36.
32. *Arthaśāstra*, 7.2.19, 8.1.54, 1.16.29.
33. *Arthaśāstra*, 8.4.41–48.
34. *Arthaśāstra*, 7.2.19, 8.1.54, 1.16.29, 1.12.33, 1.16.29, 5.6.12, 7.2.19, 13.3.17.
35. *Arthaśāstra*, 3.12.2.
36. *Arthaśāstra*, 4.5.15.
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12

*Syndicated Hinduism**[1]

The term Hinduism as we understand it today to describe a particular religion is modern, as also is the concept which it presupposes, both resulting from a series of choices made from a range of belief, ritual and practice which were collated into the creation of this religion. Unlike Christianity and Islam (with which the comparison is often made), which began with a founder and structure at a point in time and evolved largely in relation to them, Hinduism (and I use the word here in its contemporary meaning) has been constituted largely through a range of reaction to specific historical situations. This is partly why some prefer to use the phrase Hindu religions (in the plural) rather than Hinduism. Ironically there has been little analysis of the various manifestations of Hinduism from a historical perspective. The normative and the empirical in the analysis of Hinduism are seldom interwoven. Comparisons with Semitic religions—particularly Islam and Christianity—are not fortuitous since these have been catalysts in the search for a structure among contemporary Hindus.

Whereas linear religions such as Buddhism and Jainism or Christianity and Islam can be seen to change in a historical dimension, both reacting to their original structure and the interaction with the constituents of historical circumstances, such changes are more easily seen in individual Hindu sects rather than in Hinduism as a whole. This may be a partial explanation for the general reluctance of scholars of Hinduism to relate manifestations of Hinduism to their historical context and to social change.

The study of what is regarded as Hindu philosophy and religious texts has been so emphasised as almost to ignore those who are the practitioners of these tenets, beliefs, rituals and ideas. The latter became an interest of nineteenth century ethnography but this was not generally juxtaposed with textual data. Furthermore the view has generally been from above, since the texts were first composed in Sanskrit and their interpreters were *brāhmaṇas*. But precisely because Hinduism is not a linear religion, it becomes necessary to look at the situation further down the social scale where the majority of its practitioners are located. The religious practices of the latter may differ from those at the upper levels to a degree considerably greater than that of a uniform, centralised, monolithic religion.

Discussions on Hinduism tend to be confined to Hindu philosophy and theory. But the manifestation of a contemporary, resurgent, active movement, largely galvanised for political ends, provides a rather different focus to such discussions. It is with the projections of this form of popular Hinduism and of its past that this article forms a comment. The kind of Hinduism which is being currently propagated by the Sanghs, Parishads and Sammelans, is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions into a monolithic, uniform religion, paralleling some of the features of Semitic religions. This seems to be a fundamental departure from the essentials of what may be called the indigenous Hindu religions. Its form is not only in many ways alien to the earlier culture of India but equally disturbing is the uniformity which it seeks to impose on the variety of Hindu religions.

My attempt here is to briefly review what might be called Hinduism through history, and observe the essentials of the earliest beginnings and the innovations introduced over time. More recent innovations of colonial times have sometimes provided the possibilities for the directions in which some segments of Hinduism are now moving. The study of Hindu philosophy and thought has its own importance but is not of central concern to this article. Religious articulation in the daily routine of life draws more heavily on social sources than on the philosophical or the theological.

Religions such as Buddhism or Islam or Christianity do diversify into sects but this diversification retains a particular reference point—that of the historical founder and the teaching embodied in a single sacred text or a group of texts regarded as the Canon. The area of discourse among the sects is tied to the dogma, tenets and theology as enunciated in the beginning. They see themselves as part of the historical process and of the unfolding of the single religion even though they may have broken away from the mainstream.

Hindu sects on the other hand generally had a distinct and independent origin related to the centrality of a particular deity and/or to a founder and to a system of beliefs. The latter could, but need not be, related to an earlier system. Only at a later stage, and if required, were attempts made to try and assimilate some of these sects into existing dominant sects through the amalgamation of new forms of recognized deities or, of new deities as the manifestations of the older ones, and by incorporating some of their mythology, ritual and custom. Subordinate sects sought to improve their status by similar incorporation from the dominant sects if they were in a position to do so.

What has survived over the centuries is not a single monolithic religion but a diversity of religious sects which we today have put together under a uniform name. The collation of these religious groups is defined as Hinduism even though the religious reference points of such groups might be quite distinct. 'Hinduism' became a convenient general label for studying the different indigenous religious expressions. This was when it was claimed that anything from atheism to animism could legitimately be regarded as part of 'Hinduism'. Today the Hindus of the Parishads and the Sanghs would look upon atheists and animists with suspicion and contempt, for the term Hinduism is being used in a different sense.

Hinduism as defined in contemporary parlance is a bringing together of beliefs, rites and practices consciously selected from those of the past, interpreted in a contemporary idiom in the last couple of centuries and the selection conditioned by historical circumstances. This is not to suggest that religions with a linear growth are superior to what may apparently be an ahistorical religion or one with multiple historical roots, but rather to emphasise the difference between the two.

In a strict sense, a reference to Hinduism would require a more precise definition of the particular variety referred to—Brahmanism, Bhakti, Tantrism, Brahmo-Samaj, Arya-Samaj, Shaiva-Siddhanta, or whatever. These are not comparable to the sects of Christianity or Islam as they do not relate to a single historical person and to a sacred text and its interpretation. Many are rooted in ritual practices and beliefs rather than in texts and it has been argued that a characteristic difference relates to the orthopraxy of Hinduism rather than to an orthodoxy.[2] Present-day Hinduism therefore cannot be seen as an evolved form with a linear growth historically from Harappan through Vedic, Puranic and Bhakti forms, although it may carry elements of these. In this it differs even from Buddhism and Jainism leave alone Christianity and Islam.

Its origin has no distinct point in time (the *Vedas* were regarded as the foundation until the discovery of the Indus civilisation in the 1920s when the starting point was then taken back to the previous millennium), no historically attested founder, no text associated with the founder, all of which reduces its historicity. This of course makes it easier to reinterpret if not to recreate a religion afresh as and when required.

Many of these features, absent in the religion as a whole, do however exist among the various sects which are sought to be included under the umbrella-label of 'Hinduism' which makes them historical entities. But then, not all these sects are agreed on identical rites, beliefs and practices as essential. Animal sacrifice and libations of alcohol would be essential to some but anathema to others among the sects which the Census of India labels as 'Hindu'. The yardstick of the Semitic religions which has been the conscious and the subconscious challenger in the modern structuring of Hinduism, would seem most inappropriate to what existed before.

We know little for certain about the Harappan religion and guesses include a possible fertility cult involving the worship of phallic symbols, a fire cult, perhaps a sacrificial ritual and rituals to legitimise rulership, some suggestive of an authoritative priesthood. The decipherment of the script will hopefully tell us more. It was earlier thought that with the ascendance of Vedic religion, the Harappan became a substratum religion, some facets of which surfaced in later periods. A different interpretation is now being put forward, and although tentative, is worth consideration. It is being suggested that some important aspects of Vedic religion may in fact have been incorporated from the earlier Harappan religion and this would include, the building of a fire-altar and even perhaps the *soma* cult.[3] The Vedic compositions even if they might incorporate elements of the earlier religion, emphasise the central role of the sacrificial ritual of the *yajña*, are suggestive of some elements of shamanism, include a gamut of deities where the *brāhmaṇa* is the intermediary to the gods and worship focuses on rituals without images. Because of the pivotal role of the *brāhmaṇa* it is sometimes referred to as the beginnings of Brahmanical Hinduism to distinguish it from other important forms of Hinduism. The Vedic compositions and the *Dharmaśāstras* (the codes of sacred and social duties) are said to constitute the norms for Brahmanism and the religious practices for the upper castes.

Brahmanism is differentiated from the subsequent religious groups by the use for the latter of the term Shramanism. The Buddhist and Jaina texts, the inscriptions of Aśoka, the description of India by Megasthenes and the accounts of Hsüan Tsang and of Al-Biruni, covering a period of more than a thousand years, all refer to two main religious categories: the *brāhmaṇas* and the *śramaṇas*.[4] The identity of the former is familiar and known. The latter were those who were often in opposition to Brahmanism such as the Buddhists, Jainas and Ājīvikas and a number of other sects associated with both renunciatory orders and a lay following, who explored areas of belief and practice different from the *Vedas* and *Dharmaśāstras*. They often preached a system of universal ethics which spanned castes and communities. This differed from the tendency to segment religious practice by caste which was characteristic of Brahmanism. The segmenting of sects is of course common even among historically evolved religions but the breaking away still retains the historical imprint of the founder, the text and the institution.

Brahmanism was free of this. The differentiating of Brahmanistic practice for a particular caste makes it an essentially different kind of segmentation. It was this segmentation which some Shramanic religions opposed in their attempt to universalise their religious teaching, as for example in the banishing of those monks and nuns thought to be creating dissension in the Buddhist *saṅgha*.[5] The hostility between Brahmanism and Shramanism was so acute that the grammarian Patañjali, when speaking of natural enemies and innate hostility refers to this and compares it to the hostility of the snake and the mongoose, the cat and the mouse.[6] The *śramaṇas* recited the divine origin of the Vedas and the vedic *yajñas* and were therefore called *nāstikas* by *brāhmaṇas*. Literature dating to the period after the fifth century AD has derogatory statements about the Jainas as heretics and Jaina literature refers to the *brāhmaṇas* as heretics. This indigenous view of the dichotomous religions of India is referred to even at the beginning of the second millennium AD by Al-Biruni who writes of the Brahmanas and the Shamaniyya.[7]

Within Brahmanism there was also segmentation but seen from the outside it seemed an entity. Brahmanism did maintain its identity and survived the centuries although not unchanged, particularly after the decline of Buddhism. This was in part because it was well-endowed with grants of land and items of wealth through intensive royal patronage, which in turn reinforced its claim to social superiority and enabled it further to emphasise its distance from other castes and their practices. The extensive use of Sanskrit as the language of rituals and learning enhanced the employment of *brāhmaṇas* in work involving literacy such as the upper levels of administration and gave them access to high political office in royal courts. This again supported its exclusive status. The use of a single language—Sanskrit—gave it a pan-Indian character, the wide geographical spread of which provided both mobility as well as a strengthening of its social identity and an economic base. Since it was also increasingly the language of the social elites and of administration, the establishment of new kingdoms from the latter part of the first millennium AD onwards resulted in an extensive employment of literate *brāhmaṇas* and especially those proficient in the *Vedas*, *Dharmaśāstras* and *Purāṇas*.

The Bhakti tradition of the first millennium AD is sometimes traced to the message of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which was interpolated into the *Mahābhārata*, to give the *Gītā* both antiquity and currency. The *Gītā* endorsed a radical change in that it moved away from the centrality of the sacrificial ritual and instead emphasised the individual's direct relation with the deity. An earlier formulation of a similar idea was current through the *Upaniṣads* where the sacrificial ritual was questioned, the centrality of rebirth was emphasised with release from rebirth being sought through meditation and *yoga* and the recognition of the *ātman-brahman* relationship. Many of the early *śramaṇa* sects had also opposed the *yajña*. The *Gītā* did however concede that *dharma* lay in observing the rules of one's own caste, *svadharma*, and the arbiters of *dharma* remained the *brāhmaṇas*. Selfless action as projected in the *Gītā* was the need to act in accordance with one's *dharma* which now became the key concept.

This shift of emphasis provided the root in later times for the emergence of a number of Bhakti sects—Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śakta and other—which provided the contours to much that is viewed as 'traditional Hinduism' or Puranic Hinduism as some prefer to call it. The Pāśupatas, the Ālvars and Nāyannārs, the Śaiva-Siddhānta and the Lingāyats, Jñāneśvara and Tukārāma, Vallabhācarya, Mīrā, Caitanya, Śankaradeva, Basava, Lalla, Tulsīdās, and so on are often bunched together as part of the Bhakti stream. In fact there are variations among them which are significant and need to be pointed out. Some among these and similar teachers accepted the earlier style of worship and practice, others were hostile to the Vedic tradition: some objected to caste distinctions and untouchability, whereas for others such distinctions posed no problems. Some of the sects opposed to caste discouraged their members from worshipping in temples or going on pilgrimages and from observing the upper caste *dharma*. A few felt that asceticism and renunciation were not paths to liberation whereas others were committed to these. Kabir and

Nanak, for instance, infused Sufi ideas into their teaching. These major differences are rarely discussed and commented upon in modern popular writing which is anxiously searching for similarities in the tradition. Yet these dissimilarities were to be expected and were in a sense their strength.

The Bhakti sects were up to a point the inheritors of the Shramanic tradition in that some were opposed to Brahmanism and the sacrificial ritual, most were in theory open to every caste and all of them were organised along sectarian lines. They arose at various times over a span of a thousand years in different parts of the subcontinent. They were specific in time, place and teacher, and were constricted in cross-regional communication by differences of language. They did not evolve out of the same original teaching nor did they spread through conversion; they arose as and when historical conditions were conducive to their growth, often intermeshed with the need for particular castes to articulate their aspirations. Hence the variation in belief and practice and the lack of awareness of predecessors or of an identity of religion across a subcontinental plane. Similarities were present in some cases but even these did not lead to a recognition of participation in a single religious movement. With the growth of the Bhakti sects, where many focused on a single deity, the worship of the iconic image of the deity gained popularity, or else a few sects refused to worship an image at all. Image-worship was possibly encouraged by the icons which had been used by Buddhists and Jainas from the Christian era onwards. Whereas Megasthenes visiting in the fourth century BC does not refer to images in discussing the religions of India, for Al-Biruni, writing in the eleventh century AD, icons are a major feature of the indigenous religions.[8]

This was also the period which saw the currency of the Śākta sects and Tantric rituals. Regarded by some as the resurgence of an indigenous belief associated with subordinate social groups (gradually becoming powerful) it was, by the end of the first millennium AD, popular at every level of society including the royal courts. The attempt in recent times to either ignore it or to give a respectable gloss to its rituals or their manifestation in the art of the period,[9] is largely because of the embarrassment these might cause to those Indians heavily influenced by Victorian puritanism and somewhat titillated in imagining erroneously that Tantric rituals consist essentially of erotic representations. That there has been little effort, except in scholarly circles, to integrate such belief systems into the definition of Hinduism derives also from the attempt to define Hinduism as Brahmanism based on upper caste rituals. Such cults were initially alien to traditional Brahmanism.

Another noticeable manifestation of non-Brahmanic religion is what has recently been euphemistically called 'folk Hinduism'—the religion of the untouchables, 'tribals' and other groups at the lower end of the social scale. This is characterised by a predominance of the worship of goddesses and spirits (*bhūta-preta*) represented symbolically and often aniconically and with rituals performed by non-*brāhmaṇa* priests: the latter for a variety of reasons, not least among them being that since the offering and libations consist of meat and alcohol, these could be regarded as polluting by *brāhmaṇas*. Needless to say, such groups would not be able to afford the costly donations required of a Brahmanical *yajña*. For the upper caste Hindus these groups were (and often still are) regarded as *mlecchas* or impure and not a part of their own religious identity. Interestingly attempts by Hindu missionaries to proselytise among such groups, lay particular emphasis on prohibitions on meat-eating and alcohol in everyday life.

The sects included in the honeycomb of what has been called Hinduism were multiple and ranged from animistic spirit cults to others based on subtle philosophic concepts. They were oriented towards the clan, the caste and the profession or else on the reversing of these identities through renunciation. The social identity of each was imprinted on its religious observances. The deities worshipped vary, the rituals differed, belief in after-life varied from the theory of *karma* and *saṃsāra* to that of *svarga* and *naraka*, heaven and hell. In the same *Mahābhārata*, where the characters of the narrative find themselves in heaven and hell at the end of the story, Kṛṣṇa preaches release from rebirth which is a very different eschatology.

This variance may in part explain why the word *dharma* became central to an understanding of religion. It referred to the duties regarded as sacred which had to be performed in accordance with one's *varṇa*, *jāti* and sect and which differed according to each of these. The constituents of *dharma* were conformity to ritual duties, social obligations and the norms of family and caste behaviour preferably as stipulated in the *Dharmaśāstras* or accepted as incontrovertible rules of behaviour. As has been noticed, theology although not absent, is not to the fore, nor any ecclesiastical authority, both of which again point to the difference between these religions and the Semitic. A major concern was with ritual purity. The performance of sacred duty heavily enmeshed in social obligations was so important that absolute individual freedom only lay in renunciation.[10]

But the significance of *dharma* was that it demarcated sharply between the upper castes—the *dvija* or twice-born—for whom it was the core of the religion and the rest of society whose conforming to *dharma* was left somewhat in abeyance, as long as it did not transgress the *dharma* of the upper castes. The latter were to that extent without *dharma* or had their own. In trying to redefine Hinduism today as a universalising religion, the implicit attempt is to try and include those without the recognised *dharma*, who have in the past been excluded; but the inclusion is not divorced from the terms of the upper caste *dharma* and this raises problems.

Hindu missionary organisations, such as those attached to the Ramakrishna Mission, the Arya Samaj, the R.S.S. and the Vishva Hindu Parishad, taking their cue from Christian missionaries are active among the *ādivāsis*, and some scheduled castes. They are converting them to a Hinduism as defined by the upper caste movements of the last two centuries. Not surprisingly there was a difference of opinion among some members of the upper castes in the early twentieth century on whether such groups can be counted as Hindus even prior to 'conversion'. The proponents of Hindutva have had contrary views about this.[11] What is important for Hindu missionaries is that these communities declare their support for the *dharma* and be ready to be labelled as Hindus in any head count of either a census or a support to a political party. That this conversion does little or nothing to change their actual status and that they continue to be looked down upon by upper caste Hindus is of course of little consequence. This is one reason why some Dalit groups have been confrontational towards caste Hindus.

The origin of the word Hindu is geographical and derives from the Sindhu river, where the Achaemenid Persians used the name Hi(n)du with variants to refer to those that live on the cis-Indus side.[12] Later the Arabs described the area as al-Hind.[13] Initially used in a geographical and an ethnic sense, the term Hindu came subsequently to be used in a religious sense for those who lived in this area but were not Muslims or Christians. Hindus became a term of administrative convenience when the Muslim rulers had to differentiate between 'the believers' and the rest. Hindu therefore referred to the rest.

The first step towards the crystallisation of what we today call Hinduism was born in the consciousness of being the amorphous, subordinate, other. In a sense this was a reversal of roles. Earlier the term *mleccha* had been used by the upper caste Hindus to refer to the impure, amorphous rest. For the upper castes, Muslims and especially those not indigenous to India, were treated as *mleccha* since they did not observe the *dharma* and were debarred from entering the sanctum of the temple and the home. Indigenous converts to Islam also came under this category but their caste origins would have set them apart initially from the amorphous Muslim. Now the upper and lower castes were clubbed together under the label of 'Hindu', a new experience for the upper castes.

This in part accounts for the belief among many upper caste Hindus today that Hinduism in the last one thousand years has been through the most severe persecution that any religion in the world has ever undergone. The need to exaggerate the persecution at the hands of the Muslim is required to justify the inculcation of anti-Muslim sentiments among the Hindus of today. Such statements brush aside the fact that there were various expressions of religious persecution in India prior to the coming of the Muslims and particularly between the Śaiva and the Buddhist and Jaina sects and that at one level, the persistence of untouchability was also a form of religious intolerance.[14] The authors of such statements conveniently forget that the last thousand years in the history of Hinduism have witnessed the establishment of the powerful Śankarācārya *maṭhas*, *āśramas*, and similar institutions attempting to provide an ecclesiastical structure to strengthen Brahmanism and conservatism; the powerful Daśanāmi and Bairāgi religious orders of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava origin, vying for patronage and frequently in confrontation; the popular cults of the Nāthapanthis; the significant sects of the Bhakti traditions which are to be found in every corner of the subcontinent; and more recently a number of socio-religious reform movements which have been aimed at reforming and strengthening Hinduism. It was also the period which saw the expansion of the cults of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma with their own mythologies, literatures, rituals and circuits of pilgrimage. What defines many Hindus today has roots in the period of Muslim rule. Facets of belief and ritual regarded as essential to Hinduism belong to more recent times. The establishment of the sects which accompanied these developments often derived from wealthy patronage including that of both Hindu and Muslim rulers, which accounted for the prosperity of temples and institutions associated with these sects. The more innovative sects were in part the result of extensive dialogues between *gurus*, *sādhus*, *pīrs* and Sufis, a dialogue which was sometimes confrontational and sometimes conciliatory.[15] The last thousand years have seen the most assertive thrust of many Hindu sects. If by persecution is meant the conversion of Hindus to Islam and Christianity, then it should be kept in mind that the majority of conversions were from the lower castes and this is more a reflection on Hindu society than on persecution. Upper caste conversions were more frequently activated by factors such as political alliances and marriage circuits and here the conversion was hardly due to persecution.[16] Tragically for those that converted on the assumption that there would be social equality in the new religion, this was never the case and the lower castes remained low in social ranking and carried their caste identities into the new religions.[17]

When the destroying of temples and the breaking of images by Muslim iconoclasts is mentioned—and quite correctly so—it should however at the same time be stated that there were also many Muslim rulers, not excluding Aurangzeb, who gave substantial donations to Hindu sects and to individual *brāhmaṇas*.[18] There was obviously more than just religious bigotry or religious tolerance involved in these actions. The relationship for example between the Mughal rulers and the Bundela *rājās*, which involved temple destruction among other things, and veered from close alliances to fierce hostility, was the product not merely of religious loyalties or differences, but the play of power and political negotiation. Nor should it be forgotten that the temple as a source of wealth was exploited even by Hindu rulers such as Harṣadeva of Kashmir who looted temples when he faced a fiscal crisis, or the Paramāra ruler who destroyed temples in the Caulukya kingdom, or the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king who tore up the temple courtyard of the Pratihāra ruler after a victorious campaign.[19] Given the opulence of large temples, the wealth stored in them required protection, but the temple was also a statement of political authority when built by a ruler.

The European adoption of the term 'Hindu' gave it further currency as also the attempts of Catholic and Protestant Christian missionaries to convert the Gentoo/Hindu to Christianity. The pressure to convert, initially disassociated with European commercial activity, changed with the coming of British colonial power when, by the early nineteenth century, missionary activities were either surreptitiously or overtly, according to context, encouraged by the colonial authority. The impact both of missionary activity and Christian colonial power resulted in considerable soul searching on the part of those Indians who were close to this new historical experience. One result was the emergence of a number of groups such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Prathana Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Theosophical Society, the Divine Life Society, the Swaminarayan movement, *et al.*, which gave greater currency to the term Hinduism. There was much more dialogue of upper caste Hindus with Christians than there had been with Muslims, partly because for the coloniser power also lay in controlling knowledge about the colonised and partly because there were far fewer Hindus converting to Christianity than had converted to Islam. Some of the neo-Hindu sects as they have come to be called, were influenced by Christianity and some reacted against it; but even the latter were not immune from its imprint. This was inevitable given that it was the religion of the coloniser.

The challenge from Christian missionaries was not merely at the level of conversions and religious debates. The more subtle form was through educational institutions necessary to the emerging Indian middle class. Many who were attracted to these neo-Hindu groups had at some point of their lives experienced Christian education and were thereafter familiar with Christian ideas. The Christian missionary model played an important part, as for example in the institutions of the Arya Samaj. The Shaiva Siddhanta Samaj was inspired by Arumuga Navalar, who was roused to reinterpret Śaivism after translating the Bible into Tamil. The movement attracted middle-class Tamils seeking a cultural self-assertion. Added to this was the contribution of some Orientalist scholars who interpreted the religious texts to further their notions of how Hinduism should be constructed.[20] The impact of Orientalism in creating the image of Indian, and particularly Hindu culture, as projected in the nineteenth century, was considerable.[21]

Those among these groups influenced by Christianity, attempted to defend, redefine and create Hinduism on the model of Christianity. They sought for the equivalent of a monotheistic God, a Book, a Prophet or a Founder and congregational worship with an institutional organisation supporting it. The implicit intention was again of defining 'the Hindu' as a reaction to being 'the other'; the subconscious model was the Semitic religion. The monotheistic God was sought in the abstract notion of Brahman, the Absolute of the *Upaniṣads* with which the individual Ātman seeks unity in the process of *mokṣa*; or else with the interpretation of the term *deva* which was translated as God, suggesting a monotheistic God. The worship of a single deity among many others is not strictly speaking monotheism, although attempts have been made by modern commentators to argue this. Unlike many of the earlier sects which were associated with a particular deity, some of these groups claimed to transcend deity and reach out to the Absolute, Infinite, the Brahman. This was an attempt to transcend segmentary interests in an effort to attain a universalistic identity, but in social customs and ritual, caste identities and distinctions between high and low continued to be maintained.

The teaching of such sects drew on what they regarded as the core of the traditions, where the notion of *karma* and *saṃsāra* for instance, came to be seen as uniting all Hindus, even though in fact this was not the case. The Upaniṣadic idea of the relation between *Ātman* and *Brahman* was seen as a kind of monotheism. The need for a Book led to one among a variety of texts being treated as such—the *Bhagavad-gītā* or the *Vedas*. The Prophet being an altogether alien idea, could at best be substituted by the teacher-figure of Kṛṣṇa, even though he was neither Prophet nor son of God. Congregational worship, not altogether alien to lower caste forms of worship, was systematised and became the channel for propagating these new versions of Hinduism. The singing of hymns and the common chanting of prayers became an important part of the ritual. The discarding of the icon by both the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj was like an allergic reaction. It was seen as a pollution of the original religion but, more likely it was the jibe of idol worship from the practitioners of Christianity and Islam which was a subconscious motivation. This was not a new feature, for some Bhakti teachers had earlier pointed out the incongruity of worshipping images rather than concentrating on devotion to the deity. A reaction against the icon, but a substitution virtually for the image by the Book, was and is, the centrality of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in Sikh worship.

Much of the sacred literature had been in earlier times orally preserved and served a variety of social and religious ends. The epic narratives of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* were converted to sacred literature by depicting Kṛṣṇa and Rāma as *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. The narration then became that of the actions of a deity. Interpolations could also be added as and when required, as for example the *Gītā*. This is a different attitude from that of the Semitic religions to the centrality of the Book, or for that matter, from that of the Sikhs to the single, sacred text. The imprint of the idea of the sacredness of the Book itself is suggested in some late texts such as the fifteenth century *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* where it says that the reading of the text is in itself an act of worship.[22] Interestingly interpolations become far less frequent when the text is written. These new religious identities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were in part the inheritors of the older tradition of combining social aspirations with religious expression and establishing new sects. But at the same time they were conscious of the attempt to create a different kind of religion from the past and which gave currency to the term Hinduism.

Traditional flexibility in juxtaposing sects as an idiom of social change as well as the basic concepts of religious expression now became problematic. In the absence of a single 'jealous' God, often associated with monotheism and demanding complete and undiluted loyalty from the worshipper, there were instead multiple deities, some of which were superseded over time and others which were created as and when required. Thus the major Vedic deities—Indra, Mitra, Varuna and Agni—declined with the rise of Śiva and Viṣṇu at the turn of the Christian era. The latter have remained major deities supported by sects which are not always in agreement about what the deities represent for them. This has not prevented the creation of an altogether new deity, as has been witnessed in the last half century with the very popular worship in northern India of the goddess, Santoshi Mā.

The attitude to deity would in part support the argument that it is not theology which is important in Hinduism but the mode of worship. The Vedic *yajña* has a carefully orchestrated performance of ritual with the meticulous ordering of every detail including the correct pronunciation of the words constituting the *mantra*. Worship as *bhakti* in Puranic Hinduism is more personalised and informal. The earlier emphasis on oblation and sacrificial ritual was now transformed into sharing in the grace of the deity and devotion to the deity, sometimes even taken to the extreme of ritual suicide.[23] The deity was conceptualised in a variety of ways—abstract, aniconic, an image or an image elaborately sculpted and housed in an equally elaborate temple. Devotion could also be expressed in various ways. There was no requirement of uniformity in methods of worship or in who performed the ritual. There was little ecclesiastical order involved and no centralised church. The caste of the worshipper frequently conditioned the nature of the ritual and the method of worship. This included the caste of the priest, the contents of the offering, the language and form of the prayer and even at times the particular manifestation of a deity. This was evident in even the diversity of shrines and temples in a single village.

Because worship was so closely tied to caste and recruitment to caste was by birth, the question of conversion became irrelevant. In its absence, sects emerged either independently, or through segmenting off or amalgamating with similar sects. The religious sect was also an avenue to caste mobility. Origin myths of middle and lower castes often maintain that the caste was originally of higher status but a lapse in the ritual or an unwitting act of pollution led to a loss of status.[24] Imitation of higher caste norms or the dropping of caste obligations would normally not be permitted unless justified by the creation of new religious sect. The latter would initially be regarded with hostility by the conservative but if it became socially and economically powerful it would be accommodated.[25] The absence of conversion accounted for the absence of distinction between the true follower and the infidel or pagan. Yet, distinctions of another kind were more sharply maintained, particularly among sects with a substantially upper caste following. There was an exclusion of all those who were regarded as outside the social pale and who came under the category of *mleccha*—the untouchables, some lower castes, the 'tribals' and Indian Muslims and Christians. They were segregated because they performed neither the ritual duties nor the social duties required by the *dharma*. That in many cases they were prohibited from doing so, such as entering the temple for worship, did not prevent their being excluded. There was little active attempt to change this and where it was attempted, such as in the *śuddhi* movement of the Arya Samaj, the results were negligible.

It is often said that one is born a Hindu and one cannot be converted to Hinduism, for the caste identity is determined by birth although the sectarian identity can change. The idea of conversion was much debated in the nineteenth century when various organisations wished to both reform and expand the Hindu identity as they saw it. Possibly this was also tied into the increasing consciousness of numbers with the notion of majority and minority communities being introduced into politics. Earlier it had been argued that each sect had its own regulations, obligations and duties which often drew both on religious antecedents and social requirements. Gradually if a sect acquired a large following cutting across castes it tended to become a caste in itself. This further endorses the notion that it would perhaps be more correct to speak of the Hindu religions rather than of Hinduism. Some would argue that the correct term for the latter would be *sanātana dharma*.

There was one agency which had its roots in religious articulation and which could legitimately transgress the rules of caste and this was the range of renunciatory orders. Some of these orders restricted themselves to recruiting only *brāhmaṇas*, but in the main most of them recruited from a variety of castes. Even among the latter, although theoretically the orders were open to all, there was a tendency to prefer caste Hindus. Open recruitment was possible because renouncers were expected to discard all social obligations and caste identities, and were regarded as being outside the rules of caste and *dharma*. Joining such an order was also in some cases the only legitimate form of dissent from social obligations since it required the revoking of these obligations. The multiplicity of renouncers in India has therefore to be viewed not always as inspired by otherworldly aspirations but also by the nature of the links between the social forms and dissent.[26] The Shramanic religions were similar to these sects in that they did recruit members from a range of castes although, as was the case also with Indian Islam, Indian Christianity and Sikhism, converts often retained their original caste identity, especially in the crucial area of marriage connections and occupations.[27]

Religious sects battened on patronage, whether royal or from other members of the community. Even the renunciatory orders were not averse to accepting wealth which ensured them material comforts as is evident from the many centres of such orders scattered across the Indian landscape over the last two thousand years. The wealth ranged from small donations of labour and money to extensive grants of land. The pattern of patronage to Buddhism is repeated with other religions.[28] Renunciatory orders were dependent for alms and requirements on stable societies and had therefore to be closer to the patronage of the elite, although some did maintain a reciprocal relationship with the lower castes. The initial radical thought of some of these orders was marginalised by their need for patrons. Where such economic wealth helped these sects to build institutions, whether that of the *saṅgha*, the *maṭha*, or the *khānqah*, it provided them with access to political power with the result that politics and religion were intertwined. The real texture of Indian social history in the second millennium AD has been bye-passed with the obsessive concern with simplistic Hindu-Muslim relations to the exclusion of the pertinent investigation of how politics and religion at some levels were interrelated. A further aspect is that in many cases these sectarian institutions were also centres of literacy and literacy was a powerful mechanism of social control.

Caste identities, economic wealth, literacy, and access to power also contributed to providing the edge to sectarian rivalries and conflicts. Hsüan Tsang and Kalhaṇa record the persecution of Buddhists by Śaivas, and Karnataka witnessed the destruction of Jaina temples in a conflict with the Śaivas.[29] Once the Buddhists and Jainas were virtually out of the way, hostility among the Hindu sects remained, even between ascetic groups, as is evident from the pitched battles between the Daśanāmis and the Bairāgis over the question of precedence at the Kumbha Mela.[30] Antagonism of the latter kind was not that of the Hindu against another religion but that of particular sects hostile to each other. An assessment of the degree of tolerance and non-violence, has therefore, to take into account sectarian aggression. It is true that there were no Inquisitions. This was partly because dissent was channelled into the creation of a separate sect which, if it became a renunciatory order, was less directly confrontational in society. Breakaway sects or new sects, even where they did not form renunciatory orders, found a rung on the social hierarchy of sects and their continuance and status was dependent on the social groups who became their patrons and supporters. Among the Hindu sects there was no centralised church whose supremacy was endangered by the emergence of new sects. However social subordination, justified by theories of impurity, replaced to some degree the inequities of an authoritarian church.

Religious violence is not alien to Hinduism despite the nineteenth century myth that the Hindus are by instinct and religion a non-violent people. The genesis of this myth was partly in the romantic image of the Indian past projected for example, by scholars such as Max Müller.[31] Added to this were the requirements of nationalism maintaining the spiritual superiority of Indian culture of which non-violence was treated as a component. Nonviolence as a central tenet of behaviour and morality was first enunciated and developed in the Shramanic tradition of Buddhism and Jainism. These were the religions which not only declined at various times in various regions of India, but were persecuted in some parts of the subcontinent. One is often struck by how different the message of the *Gītā* would have been and how very much closer to non-violence if Gautama Buddha had been the charioteer of Arjuna instead of Kṛṣṇa. Gandhiji's concern with *ahimsā* has been in part traced to the Jaina imprint on the culture of Kathiawar. Not that the Shramanic tradition prevented violence, but it was a central issue early on in the ethics of Buddhism and Jainism and only later enters the discussion of some Hindu sects.[32]

Sectarian institutions acted as networks across geographical areas, but their reach was limited except among some renunciatory orders. *Bhakti* as a religious manifestation was predominant throughout the subcontinent by the seventeenth century; yet curiously there was little attempt to link these regional movements to forge a single religious identity. Each tradition used a different language and there was no ecclesiastical organisation to integrate the development. There was however the gradual building up of a network around Kṛṣṇa worship at Brindavana and later Rāma worship at Ayodhya which incorporated teachers and disciples from eastern and southern India, with new foci of worship and the demarcating of a sacred topography associated with the life-cycle of the deity incarnate and a renewed emphasis on the benefits of pilgrimage. One of the side effects of pilgrimage is that it can increase the catchment area of worshippers. Nevertheless even pilgrimage tended to remain largely regional, as for instance in the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharapura in the worship of Viṣṇu as Viṭṭhala which followed a well-defined circuit relevant to Maharashtrian worshippers. The limitations to pilgrimage lay both in the nature of the cult and also in problems of distance and easy transportation. The Bhakti sects saw themselves as self-sufficient, with religious forms closely tied to local requirements. The closest to ecclesiastical organisation were the *maṭhas* associated with Śankarācārya, but these had a limited religious and social jurisdiction.

A suggested historical explanation for the spread of Bhakti sects links them to the feudalising tendencies of the period after AD 500 and parallels have been drawn between the loyalty of the peasant to the feudal lord being comparable to the devotion of the worshipper for the deity.[33] The Bhakti emphasis on *mokṣa* through devotion to a deity and through the belief in *karma* and *saṃsāra* was a convenient ideology for keeping subordinate groups under control. It was argued that they might suffer in this life, but by observing the *dharma* they would benefit in their next birth. The onus of responsibility for an unhappy condition was therefore on the individual and not on society. This gave the individual an importance which was absent in real life and therefore served to keep him/her quiescent. An explanation which requires lower castes to admit to misdemeanours even in a previous life, would hardly be widely acceptable. Common as was the belief in *karma* and *saṃsāra* it did not preclude the growth at a popular level of the concepts of heaven and hell. The multiplicity of memorials to the dead hero—the hero-stones—which increase in number after AD 500, and are found scattered in many parts of India, make it evident by symbol if not by inscription that the hero on dying a hero's death, was taken up to eternal life in heaven.[34]

The segregation of social communities in worship and religious belief and the absence of an over-arching ecclesiastical structure demanding conformity, was characteristic of the Hindu religions. Attempts at introducing an authority were made on a small scale, such as the

Śankarācārya *maṭhas*, doubtless influenced by the model of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. These did eventually become centres of pilgrimage, particularly among caste Hindus who could afford to make the journey and among renouncers. But the important source of funds and concerns related to the upper castes. The segregation led to the possibility of each group leading a comparatively separate existence. The clash could come in the competition for support and patronage. This might partially explain the notion of tolerance with which the nineteenth century invested indigenous Indian religions. However, sectarian rivalries existed, sometimes taking a violent form and the coming of Islam added to the number of competing sects.

It was however within the broad spectrum of what has been called Puranic religion and that of the Bhakti sects that there was a dialogue between these and Islam resulting in some mutual borrowing. Curiously there was little overt interest in Islamic theology among learned *brāhmaṇas*. There are hardly any major studies of Islam in Sanskrit whereas the regional languages do provide evidence of a lively interest, either directly or indirectly, in the religious interface between Hindu and Islamic religions.[35] Interestingly, Muslims were referred to not as such but as either Turuṣka/Turk, Śaka, Yavana or *mleccha*. The first three have a historical ancestry and were used for people coming from central Asia or west Asia and the last referred to social distance. It is strange that what we today see as an essentially religious difference does not get projected in these terms although it was evidently present.

The more learned among Muslim authors such as Abu'l Fazl merely give resumés of Brahmanism when it comes to details about the indigenous religions, presumably because this was the most prestigious and accessible. There is much less detail of the other sects except in a generalised way. Abu'l Fazl refers to the strife among the various indigenous religions which he attributes to diversity in language as well as the resistance of Hindus to discuss their religions with foreigners.[36] He lists four kinds of worship among Hindus: the preeminent is the *pūjā* of the image, the second is the *yajña* or sacrificial ritual, the third is *dāna* or gift-giving and the fourth is *śrāddha* offered in honour of the ancestors.

In the histories of India written in the last two centuries, Islam and Hinduism are generally projected as two monolithic, antagonistic religions, face-to-face. For the conservative in Islam the Indian experience must have been bewildering since there was no recognizable ecclesiastical authority to which it could address itself. It faced a large variety of belief systems of which the most noticeable common feature was idol-worship—but even this was by no means uniform. This may also partially account for the success of the Sufis as agencies of conversion to Islam, their beliefs and religious practices sometimes being more flexible and varying as compared to the Islam of the theologians.

It is often said that the Hindus must have been upset at seeing Turkish and Mongol soldiers in their heavy boots trampling the floors of the temples. This would certainly have been traumatic. But the question arises as to which Hindus were thus traumatized? For the same temple now entered by *mleccha* soldiers was in any case open only to a section of the caste Hindus and its sanctum would have been barred to the large population consisting of the indigenous *mleccha*. The feelings of the latter were of little concern to the caste Hindus who had worshipped at these temples. The trauma was therefore more in the nature of the polluting of the temple rather than the confrontation on any substantial scale with another religion.

Brāhmaṇa-Śramaṇa hostility did not disappear over time. It kept cropping up and books authored by *brāhmaṇas* in the first millennium AD often refer to Buddhists and Jainas as heretics—*pakhaṇḍa*—and the same word is used in some Jaina texts for *brāhmaṇas*.[37] Brahmanism was also distanced from certain Bhakti sects and some Śākta groups, since the latter in particular had rituals offensive to Brahmanism. Inevitably however with the increasing incorporation of Tantric ideas into the religion especially of the elite groups, one expression of the claim to legitimacy was the 'Sanskritisation', literally, of the texts of such sects. This required both the accommodation of some categories of *brāhmaṇa* priests in the performance of the ritual, when with the decline of Vedic ritual by this time other forms of ritual held out a more promising patronage for the *brāhmaṇas*; as well as a process of 'brahmanisation' of the priests who had earlier performed the rituals. The separateness of such sects was forced to narrow though not to amalgamate, when they were all, *brāhmaṇas, śramaṇas* and the rest, forced to come under the single label of Hindu. A formal closeness was imposed on them by the coming of Islam and the categorisation for the first time of all indigenous cults as 'Hindu' where the term carried the connotation of 'the Other'.

A further crisis came with the arrival of Christianity riding on the powerful wave of colonialism. This experience of both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity was very different from the much earlier arrival of Syrian Christianity which came in the wake of traders and had a limited geographical reach. In the projected superiority of Semitic religions, it was once again the Hindus who were regarded as 'the Other' and this again included both the Brahmanic and Shramanic religions. This time the Christian dialogue was with Brahmanism and this was not altogether unexpected considering that the Indian middle class was to emerge from the ranks of the upper castes, and among these, initially, the *brāhmaṇas*, were the more significant.

Inevitably the Brahmanical base of what was seen as the new or neo-Hinduism was unavoidable. But merged into it were also various practices of upper caste worship and of course the subconscious model of Christianity and Islam. Its close links with certain nationalist opinion gave to many of these neo-Hindu movements a political edge which remains recognisable even today. It is this development which was the parent to what I should like to call Syndicated Hinduism and which is being projected by some vocal and politically powerful segments of what is referred to as the Hindu community,[38] as the sole claimant to the inheritance of indigenous Indian religion.

It goes without saying that if Indian society is changing then its religious expressions must also undergo change. But the direction of this change is perhaps alarming. The emergence of the powerful middle-class with urban moorings and a reach to the rural rich would find it useful to bring into politics a uniform, monolithic, Hinduism created to serve its new requirements. Under the guise of such a Hinduism, claiming to be the revival of an ancient, traditional form, but in effect being a new creation, an effort is made to draw a large clientele and to speak with the voice of numbers. This voice has been created to support claims of majoritarianism based on a religious identity in the functioning of democracy.

The appeal of such a Hinduism to the middle-class is obvious since it becomes a mechanism for forging a new identity aimed at protecting the interests of the middle-class, even if this is not made widely apparent. To those lower down in society there would be the attraction of upward mobility through a new religious movement. Such groups having forsaken some of their ideologies of non-caste religious sects, as from the Bhakti tradition, would have to accept the *dharma* of the powerful but remain subordinate. A change in this direction has introduced new problems. In wishing away the weaknesses of the old, one does not want to bring in the predictable disasters of the new.

Perhaps the major asset of what we call Hinduism of the pre-modern period was that it was not a uniform, monolithic religion, but a flexible juxtaposition of religious sects. This flexibility was its strength and its distinguishing feature, allowing the inclusion even of groups questioning the *Vedas*, disavowing caste and the injunctions of the *Dharmaśāstras*. The weakening or disappearance of such dissenting groups within the framework even of religious expression would be a considerable loss. If Syndicated Hinduism could simultaneously do away with social hierarchies, this might mitigate its lack of flexibility. But the scramble to use it politically merely results in realignments within the hierarchy.

Syndicated Hinduism draws largely on reinterpreting Brahmanical texts of which the *Gītā* is an obvious choice, defends the *Dharmaśāstras* and underlines a brand of conservatism in the guise of a modern, reformed religion. The model is in fact that of Islam and Christianity. There is a search for a central book and recently, on the wave of the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation, there has been a focus on the *Rāmāyaṅa* with the insistence on the historicity of Rāma which makes him into a founder. Ecclesiastical authority is sought for in requesting the Śankarācārya to pronounce upon all matters religious, social and political. Meetings of the *dharmasansads* call upon *dharmācāryas*, *sādhus* and *sants* to give opinions on any matter of importance, which is then said to be binding even if opposed to the Constitution or the rulings of the Supreme Court of India. This process is described as the Hindu Vatican. That these persons may be self-appointed *sants* and *sādhus* is of no consequence. Worship is increasingly congregational and the introduction of sermon-style homilies on the definition of a good Hindu and Hindu belief and behaviour, are becoming common at marriages and funerals and register a distinct change from earlier practice.[39] This form of Hinduism ends up inevitably as an oversimplified Brahmanism selected with mixed elements of Bhakti and Puranic forms of belief and practice, largely to draw in increasing numbers of supporters. Since religion in India was articulated through sects and this became characteristic, Islam in India took forms similar to the local. This made it somewhat different in social organization from Islam in West Asia. Apart from the Sunni–Shi'a divide of earlier times, the establishing of the varied Sufi schools in India and their evolving into sects led to much that was more an interweaving between sects even with non-Islamic regions. Such sects had larger followings than those of the more conventional or orthodox Indian Islam, what can be called 'formal' Islam.

It makes for a better understanding of the historical evolution of religion if the perspective projected is that of the sect.

The call to unite under Hinduism as a political identity is if anything, anachronistic. Social and economic inequality, whether one disapproves of it or condones it, was foundational to Brahmanism. To propagate the texts associated with this view and yet insist that it is an egalitarian philosophy is hardly acceptable. Some religions such as Islam are, in theory, egalitarian. Others such as Buddhism restrict equality to the moral and ethical spheres of life. The major religions arose and evolved in societies and in periods when inequality was not only a fact of life but was not questioned as a matter of right. The social function of these religions was not to change this but to ameliorate the reality for those who found it harsh and abrasive. Further, as a proselytising religion, Syndicated Hinduism cannot accept a multiplicity of religious statements as being equally important. Clearly some beliefs, rituals and practices will have to be selected from among an extensive range, and be regarded as essential and therefore more significant. Such an essentialising of scripture invests it with the potentialities of fundamentalism. This is a substantial departure from the traditional position. Who does the selecting and from what sources and to what purpose, also becomes a matter of considerable significance. In the absence of a single, authoritative scripture, those who make this selection will be questioned by others, unless they can back up their selection with the threat of force or control over power. This assertion is also encouraged by the success of comparable organisations in various parts of the world, based on a sharply contoured body of belief and practice backed by scripture emanating from a religious tradition.

Equally important to Syndicated Hinduism is the means of its propagation. It uses a variety of existing organisations from the erstwhile rather secretive RSS to the strident Bajrang Dal. The thrust is aggressive and categorical rather than persuasive. There is an impressive exploitation of modern communication media—audiovisual and print—with a substantial dose of spectacle, drama and hysteria. Television serials on Doordarshan, such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* present what is intended to be the received version of these texts. Others such as *Chanakya* are an evident underlining of Hindu nationalism with the pretext of using history. Received versions are an attempt to erode variants. Television serials have accelerated the pace of propaganda from the more slow-moving, 'mythological' films of earlier decades. The resort to media presentations gives it a veneer of modernisation, but the essential message remains conservative.

Another factor of increasing importance to this Syndicated Hinduism is the trans-national dimension in what might be called the Hindu diaspora—the dispersal of Hindus in various parts of the globe. In the pre-modern period there were Indians settled mainly as traders in many parts of Asia, but these were small settlements. The large colonies of present times are related to colonial needs. These are the result either of migration in the nineteenth century when immigrant labour was moved by the colonisers to other parts of the British empire such as to Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad, Malaysia and Fiji, or of traders being inducted into east and south Africa, or of the arrival of workers and/or middle-class professionals in the United Kingdom, North America, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, after 1947, in search of better job opportunities. Such communities settled outside India, experience a sense of cultural insecurity since they are minority communities, frequently in a largely Christian or Islamic society. Their search is for a form of Hinduism parallel to Christianity or Islam and with an idiom comprehensible to these other two which they can teach their children (preferably we are told, through the equivalent of Hindu 'Sunday' schools and video films). These communities with their particular requirements and their not inconsequential financial support also provide the basis for the institutions and propaganda for, Syndicated Hinduism.[40]

The importance of this diaspora is reflected not only in the social links between those in India and those abroad supporting this new form of Hinduism, but also in the growing frequency with which the Sanghs and Parishads hold their meeting abroad and seek the support and conversion of the affluent.[41] Conversion often takes the form of re-establishing faith in this new Hinduism and creating a demand for the overt expression of this loyalty as a form of identity. This is not to be confused with the guru-cult in affluent societies where there is little attempt to convert people to Hinduism, but rather to suggest to them methods of 'self-realisation' irrespective of their religious affiliations.

The creation of this Syndicated Hinduism for purposes more political than religious and mainly supportive of the ambitions of an emerging social class, has been a long process during this century and has now come more clearly into focus. Whatever political justification it might have claimed in the past as a form of nationalist assertion against British rule, no longer exists. Its growing strength relates to a number of features which have come to dominate the contours more particularly of urban middle class Indian society today. Changing social mores result in a sense of insecurity, particularly as the move towards a consumer oriented society is now on the increase and keeping up with the consumer market is seen as a necessity. The change in the economy brings in greater scope for individual enterprise, witnessed in the phenomenal expansion of the Indian middle-class, not just since 1947 but more so in the last two decades. But the required competition implicit in a liberalised, market economy also increases the sense of insecurity. The injection of egalitarian ideas into a hitherto hierarchical society creates its own forms of social disequilibrium. The solution is sought in the search for a scapegoat or an enemy within, and here the politics of the partition of India in 1947 return forcefully in the building up of hostility against the Muslims, hostility which can easily be extended to Christians, and when occasion demands, to Sikhs. This hostility further feeds the insecurity and sense of powerlessness of those communities which are smaller in numbers and often disadvantaged. There is also the tacit recognition that the lower castes cannot be subordinated for long given the use of the ballot and the concession to reservations in the struggle for a place in the corridors of power. But the concern for the lower castes and Dalits is essentially a form of tokenism. The ideology of Syndicated Hinduism remains an ideology endorsing the status of the middle-class.[42]

Social groups in the past have expressed their aspirations in part by creating new religious sects. We are now witnessing a movement that seeks to go beyond sectarian appeal and claims to represent 'the Hindus' and insists on a particular identity for all those who are technically called Hindus, irrespective of whether they wish it or not. In a sense the notion of 'the Hindu' as it evolved in Islamic writing has now come to fruition in this claim. The emergence of Syndicated Hinduism is different both in scale and scope and is not restricted to the creation of a new sect but a new religious form seeking to encapsulate all the earlier sects. The extensive use of the media is a paradigm change in communication and permits of the possibility of reaching an all-India audience. The sheer scale as well as motivation, call for concern. Syndicated Hinduism claims to be re-establishing the Hinduism of pre-modern times: in fact it is only establishing itself and in the process distorting the historical and cultural dimensions of the indigenous religions and divesting them of the nuances and variety which were major sources of their enrichment. The survival and continuation through history of many such religious manifestations was not only through power and dominance but also in many instances through the sense of security that their presence and existence would not be prohibited. There is something to be said for attempting to comprehend the real religious expression of Indian civilisation before it is crushed beneath the wheels of the Toyota-*rathas*.

Notes and References

* Published in G.D. Sontheimer and H. Kulke (eds), *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 1997, 54–81.

1. This article was first published under the title of 'Syndicated Moksa?', in *Seminar*, September 1985, no. 313 and intended for the general reader. It remains substantially the same except for some updating and the addition of a few references. I would like to thank Kunal Chakrabarti for his comments on the earlier article. Reference is made in this article to 'the Semitic religions', a term used for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It refers primarily to the fact that their scriptures were written in the Semitic languages, such as Hebrew and Arabic, and to the similarities in their religious tradition. The term is not intended to mean the Semitic race, since this would exclude the major point under discussion which is that their structure of belief and practice, is different from that of Hinduism.
2. F. Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*, Berkeley, 1975, 65, 173.
3. F. Staal, *Agni*, vol. 1, Berkeley, 1982, 27–166. H. Converse, 'The Agnicayana Rite: Indigenous Origin?', *History of Religion*, 1974, 14, 81–95; I. Mahadevan, 'The Cult Object on Unicorn Seals: A Sacred Filter?', *Purātattva*, 1981–83, 13–14, 165–86.
4. Strabo, 15.1.39; Arrian, 11; J. Bloch, *Les Inscriptions d'Asoka*, Paris, 1950, 97, 99, 112; S. Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, Delhi, 1969 (reprint).
5. This is clear from the well-known Schism Edict of Aśoka. Bloch, *Les Inscriptions d'Asoka*, 152–3.
6. S.D. Joshi (ed.), *Patañjali Vyākarana Mahābhāṣyam*, Poona, 1968, 2.4.9; 1.4.76.
7. E. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, Delhi, 1964 (reprint), 21.
8. J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, London, 1877, 98; Strabo, 15.1.59. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, 111ff.
9. For a sober and insightful interpretation see the discussion in Devanagana Desai, *Erotic Sculpture of India*, New Delhi, 1975. *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*, Mumbai, 1996.
10. R. Thapar, 'Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-culture?', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Delhi, 1978, 63–104. 'Householders

and Renouncers in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Traditions', in T.N. Madan (ed.), *Way of Life*, Delhi, 1982, 273–99. See chapters 6 and 7 in this volume.

11. Gyan Pande, 'Which of Us Are Hindus', in G. Pande (ed.), *Hindus and Others*, Delhi, 1993, 238–72.
12. R.G. Kent, *Old Persian*, New Haven, 1950, 170ff.
13. A. Wink, *Al-Hind*, Delhi, 1990, 10ff.
14. R. Thapar, *Cultural Transaction and Early India*, New Delhi, 1993. See chapter 13 in this volume.
15. Ashim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, New Jersey, 1983. H. van Skyhawk, 'Vaishnava Perceptions of Muslims in Eighteenth Century Maharashtra', in A.L. Dallapicola and S. Zingel–Avelallemant (eds), *Islam and Indian Religions*, Stuttgart.
16. S.I. Zaidi and S. Zaidi, 'Conversion to Islam and Formation of Castes in Rajasthan', in A.J. Baisar and S.P. Verma (eds), *Art and Culture*, Delhi, 1992.
17. E.g., R. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, New Jersey, 1978, 310ff, Bijapur.
18. As for example, K.K. Datta (ed.), *Some Firmans, Sanads and Parwanas* (1578–1802), Patna, 1962. B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori*, Simla, 1969.
19. Kalhana, *Rājataraṅginī*, 7.1081–95; P. Bhatia, *The Paramaras*, Delhi, 1970, 140ff; 269. *Epigraphia Indica*, VI, 38 v. 19.
20. D. Knopf, 'Hermeneutics versus History', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 1980, 39, 3, 495–505.
21. R. Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Delhi, 1993.
22. R. Thapar, 'A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama', in S. Gopal (ed.), *Anatomy of Confrontation*, Delhi, 1991, 153ff. See chapter 13 in volume I.
23. This is occasionally illustrated in memorial stones dedicated to a person who has committed ritual suicide with a depiction of the act. N.K.L. Murthy, 'Memorial Stones in Andhra Pradesh', in S. Settar and G.D. Sontheimer (eds), *Memorial Stones*, Dharwad, 1982, 212ff.
24. E.g., V. Das, 'A Sociological Approach to the Caste Puranas of Gujerat: A Case Study', *Sociological Bulletin*, 1968, 17, 141–64.
25. An interesting case in point is the history of the Liṅgāyat sect in Karnataka, originally a religious sectarian movement but today a powerful caste as well.
26. R. Thapar, 'Dissent and Protest in the Early Indian Tradition', Diogenes, 981, 113–14, 31–54. See chapter 5 in this volume.
27. Imtiaz Ahmed (ed.), *Caste and Social Stratification Among the Muslims*, Delhi, 1973.
28. Buddhist sects initially began with small gifts of cells, cisterns and assistance with building a *stūpa*, or royal investments with guilds of which the interest was donated; and later, as at Nalanda, received the revenue of a hundred or even two hundred villages. R. Thapar, 'Patronage and Community', in

B. Stoler Miller (ed.), *The Powers of Art*, Delhi, 1992, 19–34. See chapter 14 in this volume. Nasik Cave Inscription No. 10, *Epigraphia Indica*, 8.78ff. S. Beal, *Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, Delhi, 1973 (reprint), 112.

29. R. Thapar, *Cultural Transaction and Early India*.
30. These were so endemic that there are miniature paintings of the Mughal period depicting such battles.
31. M. Müller, *India, What Can It Teach Us?*, London, 1983, 101ff.
32. Sporadic killing apart, even the violence involved in the recent burning of Hindu brides does not elicit any threat against the perpetrators of such violence from the spokesmen of Hinduism. Feminist groups are the main agitators against such acts.
33. M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, 'Bhakti Movement in South India', in D. Jha (ed.), *Feudal Social Formation in Early India*, Delhi, 1987, 348–75.
34. S. Settar and G.D. Sontheimer (eds), *Memorial Stones*, Dharwad, 1982. R. Thapar, 'Death and the Hero', in S.C. Humphreys and H. King (eds), *Mortality and Immortality: The Anthropology and Archaeology of Death*, London, 1981, 293–316. See chapter 5 in volume III.
35. E.g., N. Wagle, 'Hindu–Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra', in G.D. Sontheimer and H. Kulke (eds), *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 1997, 134–52.
36. Abu'l Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, III, trans. H.S. Jarret, Delhi, 1978 (reprint).
37. E.g., Kṛṣṇa Misra, *Prabodhacandrodaya*, V.L. Pansikar (ed.), Bombay, 1916. Vimalasūri, *Paumacariyam*, H. Jacobi (ed.), Varanasi, 1962.
38. The Rāṣṭra Svāyamsevak Saṅgh and the Vishva Hindu Parishad in particular, as is evident from a reading of their periodicals and literature.
39. Given today's centrality of the notion of profit and the market and the message of the media, the sale of cassettes and tapes with prerecorded hymns and sermons in support of uniform practice and belief are often on sale where there are large gatherings, such as at funerals.
40. According to *Fortune International*, Indians in the USA are the richest foreign-born group, in Britain they own 60 per cent of all retail stores, and in Hong Kong, control a tenth of its exports.
41. The most recent example of this was the convention organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad in Washington in 1993 to commemorate the anniversary of Vivekananda's visit to America. Where, a century ago, Vivekananda was virtually introducing Hinduism to an international audience as a religion given to tolerance and religious laissez-faire, what was now being commemorated in his name was an aggressive, assertive, outgoing drive for a religious identity with strong political aspirations for Hindus both in the United States and in India.
42. This was demonstrated for example in the anti-reservation movement by members of the middle class taking to the streets and to self-immolation, when the V.P. Singh government announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report.

13

Cultural Transaction and Early India

*Tradition and Patronage**

Tradition

A variety of beliefs about India's past have simmered over the last couple of hundred years. Some among them have come to be accepted as part of the country's cultural tradition and have been accorded the status of tradition. It may be argued that this happens when societies are searching for identity and the pronouncements of historians, particularly of cultural historians, come to be accepted as axioms. It becomes necessary therefore for historians to pause from time to time, to take stock as it were by asking whether what has come to be accepted as tradition deserves to be so accepted. This is what I propose to attempt in the two lectures. The change of focus becomes imperative either when there is new information on the past or when the process of interpreting the past undergoes change. It is primarily the latter which in this case suggests a re-assessment.

A consideration of cultural history would have to begin with an attempt at defining culture and this has been the subject of much discussion in recent decades. I can at best attempt a very brief summary.

The term culture itself has its own history. The primary meaning of culture is the cultivating of natural growth and by extension in recent times it has come to mean the cultivating of the human mind. Among historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries culture and civilization almost became synonymous. The association of culture was however with superior social groups. The inadequacy of this limitation contributed towards the redefinition of the term in which it was extended to include all patterns of behaviour and ways of life. Culture therefore refers to behaviour patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols. It includes language, tradition, customs and institutions. It is in this wider sense that I am using the term.

Furthermore, culture in relation to tradition links the past to the present. It has therefore a historical context which is as significant as the cultural form itself.

The historical process is decisive to the definition of culture, yet the understanding of Indian culture is poorly served in this respect, for it is assumed that the historical process has a static interpretation and has remained broadly unchanged over the last century, or, that culture is a one-time event which has survived untampered with from the past to the present. From newspaper editors to prime ministers everyone pronounces on the civilization and culture of the Indian past, unblushingly unconcerned with their historical basis. There are now, at least among historians, new kinds of analyses of cultural institutions and forms. Cultural history and its analysis juxtaposes the form with those who create it and those who order its creation, and also attempts to see it as a social signal.

The continuity of culture is generally related to traditions which, in turn, are made up of cultural forms. Tradition is defined as the handing down of knowledge or the passing on of a doctrine or a technique. Cultural history implies looking analytically both at what goes into the making of a tradition as well as that which is interpreted by historians as tradition. We often assume that a form is handed down in an unchanging fashion and that what comes to us is its pristine form. However, the sheer act of handing on a tradition introduces change, and not every tradition is meticulously bound by mnemonic or other devices to prevent interpolations or change. A tradition, therefore, has to be seen in its various phases. Even the concept of *paramparā*, which at one level appears to be frozen knowledge, reveals on investigation variations and change. Traditions which we today believe have long pedigrees may on an historical analysis be found to be an invention of yesterday. In other words, what we regard as tradition may well turn out to be our contemporary requirements fashioned by the way we wish to interpret the past. Interpretations of the past have also come to be treated as knowledge and are handed down as tradition. I would like to consider some of these interpretations in their historical context, for this may clarify their validity or otherwise to being regarded as tradition.

Let me illustrate these ideas with a few examples.

The disjuncture between normative values and social reality is often so evident that it is sometimes surprising to come across normative values being taken for descriptions of reality. But it is necessary to distinguish between the organization of external reality as a theory and the reality itself. Thus, the *dharmaśāstras*, the normative texts *par excellence*, inform us of the rules of *varṇa*. It is assumed that at least the members of the higher *varṇa* observe these rules. However, from the earliest times there are certain discrepancies. The Vedic texts refer to various important Vedic *brāhmaṇas* as *dāsīputraḥ*, being born of *dāsīs*.[1] Dīrghatamas, who is described as the son of a *dāsī*, in turn married a *dāsī* whom he is said to have found among strange people in the east, and she was mother to his son, the respected *ṛṣi* Kakṣīvant. Evidently these *brāhmaṇas* took the rule of exogamy literally and married far out. But equally intriguing is the origin of the compiler of the *Mahābhārata*, the learned Veda Vyāsa. His father, the *ṛṣi* Parāśara, became enamoured of a girl of a fisherman's community as she rowed him across the river. Despite her fishy odour he made his intentions clear. She resisted him at first, but finally accepted his advances when he promised that she would be rid of the odour of fish. The boat was enveloped in a discreet curtain of clouds and the now sweet-scented girl eventually gave birth to Veda Vyāsa. The ambiguity of his mother's origins are further complicated by the story that she had been an *apsarā's* daughter abandoned as a foundling among fisher folk.[2] And this becomes a stereotype among such origin myths, raising a host of questions regarding the treatment of identity.

How are we to interpret this? First of all, and certainly, that our ancestors had a sense of humour and were willing to invent stories about these lapses from the normative perspective of even those whom they revered—a quality which is difficult to find in contemporary India, for such stories would be unheard of today. But what is more important, and once we get past the symbolic meaning, is that origins obviously do not have to conform to normative rules and were possibly not very significant.

This is even more marked in the origin myths of a variety of royal families claiming *kṣatriya* status in the post-Gupta period.[3] Prior to the Gupta dynasty the *Purāṇas* refer to such families being of *brāhmaṇa* and even *śūdra* origin. Few in fact were *kṣatriya* in spite of the insistence of the normative texts on the *kṣatriya* origins of ruling families. The myths of many such families of the later period, as those of the Guhilla and Candella, make one suspect that the families may have been obscure and that they sought status through fabricated genealogies, linking them to the Sūryavaṃśa and Candravaṃśa lineages, which lineages seem also to have been an invention of a particular historical time.

In shying away from coming to terms with this divergence, we blind ourselves to the possible flexibility of a society which, in certain situations, was probably as important a characteristic as the theoretical insistence on the minutae of rules of social behaviour. We thereby provide a simplistic explanation for a complex arrangement. The concession to the *brāhmaṇa* that he could marry into any *varṇa* was, in some ways, parallel to the incorporation of belief and ritual from a variety of sources in the making of religious sects—an incorporation which defies the forcing of what we call Hindu sects into a homogenous, uniform, clearly identifiable and ecclesiastically organized religious entity. This epitomizes a perspective different from that of the Semitic model.

But how are we to interpret high culture literature which mocks the *brāhmaṇa*? In the plays of Kālidāsa the *vidūṣaka*—the stereotype of companion or jester—is a *brāhmaṇa* not speaking Sanskrit and mocking the essence of Brahmanism as contained in the *dharmaśāstras*. The normative texts, of course, do not carry even a hint of the *vidūṣaka* as a category of *brāhmaṇa*. Admittedly, in a literature intended for the royal court the foil to the king could only be a *brāhmaṇa*, since a member of another caste would amount to *lèse majestie*. But did he have to be such a non-Brahmanical *brāhmaṇa* that even the king mocks the *brāhmaṇa* in him? Was this an ironic commentary on the *purohita* or on particular categories of *brāhmaṇas* elsewhere taken more seriously? So distinct a contravention of the norm can only point to the norm not being pervasive.

Talking of Kālidāsa, we assume that his version of the story of Śakuntalā was the one made familiar to people of all ages since the writing of the play. Yet Kālidāsa was himself taking an existing tradition and transforming it into something new and in keeping with his own time and place. There were two versions of the Śakuntalā story in circulation with two different audiences. The earlier version occurs in the *Mahābhārata*, where the origin myth of the founder of the Pūru lineage, Bharata, is recited.[4] The story begins with a massive hunt led by the Raja Duḥṣanta, where we are told that many families of tigers were laid low and many hundreds of deer killed. The hunt, as hunts in epic literature often go, is a war against nature, causing havoc and destruction all round. Arriving at the hermitage of Kaṇva, Duḥṣanta is welcomed in the absence of the *ṛṣi* by Śakuntalā, who happily converses with him without any reservation. When asked about her parentage she explains that she is the natural child of the *apsarā* Menakā and the *ṛṣi* Viśvāmitra and was left a foundling and was adopted by Kaṇva. When Duḥṣanta, attracted by her beauty, proposes a Gandharva marriage, she replies in a spirited fashion that she will agree only on condition that her son is declared the *yuvarāja*, which condition Duḥṣanta accepts. A few years later she arrives at his court with their son Bharata. Although he recognizes her, Duḥṣanta pretends not to know her and, even as she argues her rights, he abuses her parents, referring to Menakā as a slut and to Viśvāmitra as a lecher, and dismisses her as a whore. Whereupon a celestial voice proclaims that the boy is in fact the child of Duḥṣanta. He then accepts both mother and son, maintaining that his earlier pretence was merely to ensure that the legitimacy of the child would be declared before his people. The story may well have been introduced as a form of genealogical latching on.

Kālidāsa introduces the sub-plot of the signet ring which drops off Śakuntalā's finger; and Duḥṣyanta (as is the name in Kālidāsa), loses his memory owing to a curse and does not remember the association with Śakuntalā until he sees the signet ring. In effect, the feel of the play is completely different from the epic version of the story.

Śakuntalā in the epic is a confident, high-spirited, assertive young woman who knows what she is about and is not going to be taken for a ride. In the play she is submissive, shy, reserved, perhaps even a little frightened and cowed down by her love for the king. She is the new somewhat subservient woman of upper caste courtly culture who is incapable of arguing in defence of her rights or objecting to the treatment by Duḥṣyanta. Kālidāsa has invested Śakuntalā with status. The king's major concern is the need for an heir, unlike in the epic where it is Śakuntalā who is anxious that her son be declared the *yuvarāja*. Today, we have accepted Kālidāsa's depiction of the submissive woman and have ignored the far more independent characterization of the epic version, in part at least, for reasons which have to do with attempts to justify the subservience of women with an appeal to what is regarded as 'our tradition'.

Even within the tradition, the image of Śakuntalā was not universally that of the Kālidāsa play. A larger number of people were familiar with the recitation of the *Mahābhārata* version and the epic character was better known. The heroine of the play would traditionally have had a limited audience.

The play focuses on the contrast between two backgrounds, that of the forest and the court. The hermitage, which in a sense mediates between the two, is set in a natural environment where social behaviour is in accordance with the gentleness of nature. The court is a structured background with little of nature intervening and is alien to the forest. This contrast is a repeated theme in early Indian writing. The dichotomy of the *grāma* and the *āraṇya* represent the two poles of the settlement and the wilderness, of order and disorder, of the known and the unknown.

Normative texts and creative literature differ in the handling of those who live in the hermitage. The normative curriculum refers, of course, only to males of the upper caste and requires a life cycle which covers the well-known four stages of studentship, householder, renouncer and ascetic. Written into this life cycle is the opposition of *grihastha* to *samnyāsa*, of householder to ascetic.[5] The Brahmanical system insists on the fulfilment of the social obligations of a householder, that is, a gainful occupation and the procreation of a family, before renunciation can be thought of. In the Buddhist and Jaina systems renunciation or the entry to monkhood was open at any point in life. The Brahmanical system reflects the fear that renunciation at an early age may upset the requirements of society and that the true value of renunciation comes after a socially fulfilled life. That the good *grihastha* also had many obligations towards the welfare of the *brāhmaṇas*, should not be forgotten.

Generally, descriptions of the *āśrama* in creative literature do not depict a place of austere practices. They tend to be forest retreats set in sylvan surroundings with an emphasis on empathy with nature. That hermits had technically broken away from social obligations meant that they had no more to do with the *grāma* and were at one with the *āraṇya*. But somehow this did not preclude them from observing social regulations when required to do so.

Above all, through the act of renunciation and the practice of *yoga*, *tapasya* and *dhyāna*, the renouncer was believed to acquire supernormal powers. In the normative tradition renunciation was the prelude to asceticism and the means of achieving liberation from rebirth. The distance from society was intended to underline the need for isolation and contemplation in pursuit of the goal of *mokṣa*. In a sense it was a selfish act in as much as it was a-social. In effect, however, as is clear from descriptive passages referring to asceticism, the supernormal powers became an asset on which the power of the ascetic was based. It was this which enables the *ṛṣi* to acquire extra-sensory knowledge, to fly through the air, to destroy through a curse or to grant boons. In the non-normative texts the *ṛṣi* acquires the same powers as the gods, and frequently the gods fear the power of the *ṛṣi* and try to break it, as was done successfully in the case of Viśvāmitra by sending Menakā to seduce him. It would seem that at one level renunciation and the renouncer became an alternative avenue of authority in the popular mind which even kings had to accept.

This was not the power of religion, since the *ṛṣi* was not a religious functionary and was not concerned with priestly activities. At the root of his power lay the ability of the renouncer to break away from society and to contravene the normative rules of social behaviour. The case of the brāhmaṇa ascetic or *samnyāsi* was more extreme, since his death rituals were often performed before he could take up *samnyāsa* signifying a complete break with his house-holding functions. This may in part explain why the renouncer often emerged as the symbol of dissent and protest and came to be regarded as an alternative source of power, a symbolism which has been respected even in the Indian political movements of the twentieth century. The renouncer cannot be explained away in the simplistic formula of being a religious leader since he accumulates in himself a complex inter-relation of social signals.[6] As a source of alternative authority the renouncer is distinct from both priestly power and the coercive authority of the state. The socio-political role of the renouncer is, it seems to me, a characteristic feature of Indian civilization and requires a more thorough analysis. This would question the notion that Indian society has always been other-worldly because of the attraction of renunciation. Instead, it requires that we examine more analytically the many dimensions to the role of the renouncer in society.

The institutionalizing of renunciation developed early among the Buddhists, Jainas and a variety of non-Brahmanical sects referred to as *śramaṇas*. Individual liberation, it was argued, was more easily obtained through renunciation and joining the *saṅgha* or Order—a parallel or alternative society demanding the termination of social obligations at a personal level. But few of these renouncers cut themselves off completely. Most lived in the proximity of settlements, for it was enjoined upon the lay follower that he had to support monks with alms and gifts. Such acts would earn merit for the lay follower, and this accumulation of merit would assist him in his own salvation. The obligation to support the renouncer not only strengthened the *saṅgha* as an institution but also created a sense of community among lay followers. This sense of community was a contrast to the idea of *varṇāsramadharma*. *Varṇa* was the apparatus of segregation and of cordoning off groups. Buddhist social thought was more inclusive in that it cut across caste segments, and in worship and belief, at least, referred to a more universal ethic applicable to almost all. It was a community essentially of monks extended to lay followers, but not separated into castes. This sense of community may have had something to do with the aggressive hostility meted out to Buddhists and Jainas by various sects of what we have come to call the Hindu religion.

This hostility may account for the virtual weeding out of the alternative texts and perspectives, namely, those not in agreement with the Brahmanical tradition, from what we now regard as our cultural heritage. Soon after the time when the secular epic the *Rāmāyaṇa* seems to have been converted into sacred Vaiṣṇava literature by the Bhārgava *brāhmaṇas* and the hero Rāma described as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, a Jaina poet, Vimalasūri, in the early centuries AD wrote his version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Prākrit, *Paumacariyam*. It is the first of a number of Jaina versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the persistence with which the theme of what they referred to as the true *Rāmāyaṇa* was taken up, suggests that the Jaina authors had something significant to say. Vimalasūri states specifically that his is the true version as against that of the *brāhmaṇas* which is a collection of fanciful stories. The broad outlines of the story are similar, but there is a significantly different treatment of Rāvaṇa and the *rākṣasas*. It is clearly stated that the *rākṣasas* are not demons and that the word is linked to the root *rakṣ*, to protect. Rāvaṇa was neither ten-headed nor a meat-eating fiend, and all that has been said about him by foolish poets—*murkhakukavi*—is untrue.

Rāvaṇa is an ardent Jaina and a protector of Jaina shrines. Being an adept at ascetic practices, he has the ability to fly and is therefore called *ākāśamārgi*. His relationship with Sītā is sensitively portrayed as that of a man sincerely fond of her and upset by her rejection of him. The austerity of exile is frequently punctuated by prosperous villages, beautiful cities and royal palaces. The theme of exile functions as it does in all epic literature. It seeks to legitimize the association of various geographical places with the heroes of the epic. That there is a Rāma-kuṇḍ, Sītā-kuṇḍ and Pāṇḍava-lena in almost every part of the Indian subcontinent is not because the exiled heroes actually visited these areas, but because in later times, when the epics were appropriated as sacred literature in these areas, there was a desire to link local geography to the events of the epic. The theme of exile or wandering is a stereotype of epic literature and happily permits of this kind of association.

A striking difference in the *Paumacariyam* is the absence of the need to uphold the *varṇāśramadharma* and the status of the *brāhmaṇa*. Here the *brāhmaṇas* are the heretics and the preachers of false doctrines who acquired their status through fraud. The most respected social group other than princes are merchants, although maximum reverence is naturally given to the Jaina *munis*. Finally, both Daśaratha and Rāma renounce the world and the Jaina ethic triumphs over the *kṣatriya* ethic.

In many ways the *Paumacariyam* is the mirror image of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and a comparative study of the two would be most illuminating. Yet the *Paumacariyam* is dismissed as being a biased Jaina account, as though the Vālmīki version is unbiased. But the value of the *Paumacariyam* is that it presents an alternative picture growing out of an alternative system, even if it is an alternative system which has been partially eroded from what we call our tradition.

I have already mentioned that, in creating a tradition we sometimes select from the past those normative values which may have a contemporary appeal but which may even be contrary to historical actuality. The insistence on the tradition of religious tolerance and non-violence as characteristic of Hinduism, which is built on a selection of normative values emphasizing *ahiṃsā*, is not borne out by the historical evidence. The theory is so deeply ingrained among most Indians that there is a failure to see the reverse of it even when it is evident. The extremity of intolerance implicit in the notion of untouchability was glossed over by regarding it as a function of society and caste. The fact of this intolerance is now conceded so casually, that the concession is almost beginning to lose meaning. Apart from this, we also need to look at more direct examples of religious persecution. Curiously, even when historians have referred to such activities as indications of intolerance and persecution,[7] there has been a firm refusal on the part of popular opinion to concede that Hindu sects did indulge in religious persecution.

The persecution of Buddhists in Kashmir is referred to by Hsüan Tsang, but, lest it be thought that he being a Chinese Buddhist monk was prejudiced, the testimony of Kalhaṇa in the *Rājataraṅginī* should be more acceptable. Hsüan Tsang refers to the atrocities of Mihīrakula against the Buddhists both in Punjab and in Kashmir in the sixth century A.D. Hsüan

Tsang may well have been exaggerating when he lists the destruction of 1,600 Buddhist *stūpas* and *sanghārāmas* and the killing of many thousands of Buddhist monks and lay-followers.[8] Kalhana gives an even fuller account of the king killing innocent people by the hundreds.[9] This is often dismissed by attributing the anti-Buddhist actions of Mihīrakula to his being a Hūna. But it should not be forgotten that he was also an ardent Śaiva and gave grants of land in the form of *agrahāras* to the *brāhmaṇas*. In the words of Kalhaṇa: 'Brahmans from Gandhāra resembling himself in their habits and verily themselves the lowest of the twice-born accepted *agrahāras* from him.' It is possible that the recently discovered *stūpa* at Sanghol in Punjab, where sculpted railings were found in the vicinity of a *stūpa* dismantled and packed away, indicates this persecution of the Buddhists. Kalhaṇa writes of an earlier persecution of Buddhists in Kashmir and the wilful destruction of a *vihāra*, again by a Śaivite king. But on this occasion the king repented and built a new monastery for the Buddhist monks.

Courtly literature, particularly plays written after the seventh century AD, is replete with invective against Buddhist and Jaina monks who are depicted as morally depraved and dishonest. Mahendravarman's *Maṭṭavilāsa*, a farce, is amongst the early plays unsympathetic to the heretic. In the *Mudrarākṣasa* of Viśākhadatta, a constant refrain states that it is inauspicious to see a Jaina monk. The *Prabodha-candrodaya* of Kṛṣṇa Miśra, a drama of the eleventh century, dwells on the theme of a Kapālika converting a Jaina and a Buddhist monk to Śaivism by offering them wine and women, both of which they are said to hanker after. In the Śaiva temples at Khajuraho, Jaina monks, especially of the *digambara* sect, are depicted in the worst possible erotic poses.[10] Such references and depictions do not amount to persecution but reflect a contemptuous attitude towards Jaina and Buddhist monks which they would doubtless have found very galling, particularly as they occur in the literature and art of aristocratic groups. The depiction of monks and ascetics as debauched may have been due to the court's contempt for a variety of ascetics, some of whom were associated with socially unacceptable practices. Such depictions in courtly literature may also have been an attempt to play down the authority associated with renouncers and ascetics in the popular mind. But it is significant that the Buddhists and Jainas are more commonly made the subject of attack.

Evidence on the persecution of Jainas by Śaiva sects comes from a variety of sources. The earliest known cave temple originally dedicated by the Jainas in Tirunelveli district was, subsequently in the seventh century, converted into a Śaiva temple.[11] This was not a case of appropriating the temple and gradually changing it. Quite clearly, the Jaina images were either destroyed or erased, sometimes only partially, and fresh Śaivite images carved in the same place. In the case of the partially erased sculpture it is possible to recognize traces of the original. Where the image is totally gouged out the desecration is visible.

The Saivite saint Jñāna Sambander is attributed with having converted the Pāṇḍya ruler from Jainism to Shaivism, whereupon it is said that eight thousand Jainas were impaled by the king. This episode is represented in painting and sculpture in medieval temples and is enacted to this day in some Śiva temples during their annual festival. In later times, attempts were made to appease the Jainas by royal patrons building Jaina, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples in close proximity. But in these areas the Jaina temples soon fell into disrepair whilst the others flourished.

Such activities were not restricted to a particular area. The Jaina temples of Karnataka went through a traumatic experience at the hands of the Lingāyats or Vīraśaivas in the early second millennium AD.[12] This would explain in part why some Jaina texts have pejorative references to Basava, who founded the Vīraśaiva sect. The Jaina temples at Lakkuṇḍi were located in the proximity of an affluent *agrahāra* and the Vaiṣṇava *brāhmaṇas* accepted Mahāvīra as an incarnation of Brahmā. Later, however, one of the temples was converted into a Śaiva temple. At Huli, the temple of the five Jinas was converted into a *pañcalingeśvara* Śaiva temple, the five *liṅgas* replacing the five Jina images in the *sancta*.[13] Some other Jaina temples suffered the same fate. An inscription at Ablur in Dharwar eulogizes attacks on Jaina temples as retaliation for Jaina opposition to Śaiva worship.[14] Sculpted panels at this site depict the smashing of Jaina images. In the fourteenth century the harassment of Jainas was so acute that they had to appeal for protection to the ruling power at Vijayanagara.

Inscriptions of the sixteenth century from the Srisailam area of Andhra Pradesh record the pride taken by Vīraśaiva chiefs in beheading *svetāmbara* Jainas.[15] The local records of this area refer to the frequent persecution of the Jainas. In Gujarat, Jainism flourished during the reign of Kumārapāla, but his successor persecuted the Jainas and destroyed their temples.[16] However, Jainism was so well-established here that periodical persecution did not really shake it.

My purpose in drawing attention to the Śaivite persecution of Buddhists and Jainas is not an attempt at being provocative. We have here a major historical problem which requires detailed investigation. The desire to portray tolerance and non-violence as the eternal values of the Hindu tradition has led to the pushing aside of such evidence. That there were mutual intellectual borrowings in certain philosophical schools should not prevent us from seeing the reality on the ground. If there were cases of diverse religious sects co-existing, there were also situations of antagonism. The evidence of persecution raises the question of the degree to which such activities on the part of various religious groups were seen as a way of claiming ascendancy and power.

A related question is whether the Hindus as a community were aware of or perpetrated this hostility, or whether it was perpetrated only by a segment of the Hindu community, substantially the Śaivas. An historical evaluation of such persecutions would be required to ascertain the sects involved and their social affinities. If only certain segments of society, whether castes or sects, were involved, the effect of these on other segments would be worth inquiring into, as also the influence of religious militancy on the segment itself. Would these actions have had an impact on the values associated with the Hindu community, assuming, of course, that there was at this time the consciousness of a single Hindu community? The argument put forward in recent times that the Buddhists, Jainas and a variety of Hindu sects were all part of the compendium religion we call Hinduism has also contributed to these animosities being dismissed as minor, whereas the evidence points to a different assessment.

It is historically important to know why this persecution of the Buddhists and Jainas occurred in particular by the Śaivas. I can only offer a few comments. At the religious level, it may have had to do with asceticism. Was Śiva seen as the ascetic *par excellence* and the patron deity of ascetics, and were Buddhist and Jaina monks seen as imposters? Did Buddhist and Jaina monks find the worship of the *lingam* offensive owing to the puritanism inherent in both these systems? Yet the Tantric infusion into these religions conceded to practices and ideas which were opposed to puritanism. If the hostility related only to religious differences, then it should have surfaced earlier in time. It is interesting that it begins about the middle of the first millennium A.D. and gains force through the centuries until Buddhism eventually was exiled and Jainism was effectively limited to a few pockets. The persecution predates the coming of Islam to these areas, so that the convenient excuse that Islamic persecution caused the decline of these religions is not applicable.

The rise of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects was often tied to *bhakti*, and in the peninsula some sections of these sects could be the agencies of intolerance. Was the relationship between the devotee and his deity so intense that it led to an inability to tolerate other forms of religious expression? *Bhakti* teachers appealed to professional groups which gradually became socially significant—not necessarily by rising in the social scale, but by mobilizing themselves as social entities. The social organization of these religious groups differed. Whereas the Buddhists and Jainas built upon a sense of community incorporating a universalizing ethic, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects tended to be more narrowly demarcated. In a sense some of the contemporary Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects which emerged in the peninsula were protest movements articulating a new social identity, and this may have led to conflict. But this argument would not, of course, apply to the persecution of Buddhists in Kashmir. Here it appears to have been a confrontation between the *śramaṇas* and the *brāhmaṇas*, drawing on a long history of earlier animosities and where the ruling groups were also involved. The hostility would have had to do with competition for royal patronage, apart from other factors. In the case of hostility between the Vīraśaivas and the Jainas it would seem that, among other things, it resulted from competition for commercial power and patronage and the hostilities were between social groups, with an appeal to the state for protection. By the late first millennium A.D. the Buddhists in eastern India, and the Jainas in Gujarat and parts of the peninsula, had monastic estates, or else the monasteries were financed from the revenue of villages assigned to them by royalty. Some of the hostility, therefore, may have arisen over the control of property. The Jainas were a socially dominant group in competition with other similar groups. The recognition and analysis of intolerant behaviour would tell us something about the way in which social groups perceived each other.

I have been emphasizing Śaiva hostility, which is not to suggest that the Vaiṣṇavas were altogether partial to Buddhists and Jainas. But there seem to be fewer examples of persecution by the Vaiṣṇava. This, too, requires an explanation. An obvious explanation is that the *avatāra* theory of Vaiṣṇavism made it an assimilative religion except, of course, that the incorporation of a cult was generally after it had been emasculated. Thus, the Buddha in some late texts came to be treated as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

The underlying strength of this religious induction was that the *avatāra* was a-historical, in other words, the historicity of the *avatāra* and his being located in space and time was irrelevant to the religious process. This was, of course, in striking contrast to the historicity of the founders of various Vaiṣṇava sects. Unlike contemporary Hindu movements today, which seek to find birth-places and historicity for the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu and even drag in archaeology in the attempt to prove this, such searches were of little concern to the majority of the Vaiṣṇavas in the past. It becomes pertinent, therefore, to inquire into the question of the period of history when the need for historicity enters belief in the *avatāras*, and why.

The persecution of Buddhists and Jainas was not a principal concern with all Hindu sects; nevertheless it was socially important enough to be recorded by some. If there had been a Hindu community with an all-India identity, it would have been aware of the intolerance of some of its constituents and pronounced upon it. That this intolerance is not characteristic of the entire community does not suggest the tolerance of all Hindus, but, rather, that the consciousness of community determined by a religious identity, based on certain essential uniformities and cutting across segmental differences, may not have been prevalent.

The term 'Hindu' is used for the first time in Arabic sources referring to the inhabitants of the subcontinent across the Indus. For them it simply meant the indigenous. It does not appear to have been appropriated by those who constitute what we today call the Hindu community until very much later. The historical context suggests that it did not connote a specific identity but was intended to include those who were neither Muslim nor Christian. It would be worth investigating whether historically the label 'Hindu' became a convenient umbrella under which to include a large number of segments which lay outside the more identifiable followers of Islam and Christianity. In the case of Islam and Christianity the religious identity cut across caste and sectarian concerns. There was no such clear-cut religious identity among what have been called Hindu castes and sects where the caste and sectarian identity was primary. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to see the latter as separate communities. The putting together of these latter groups into what came to be seen as the Hindu community was however important to the process of nation-building in recent times.

The religious identity among groups which had constituted what has come to be called the Hindus was earlier a series of sectarian identities rather than one of a universalizing kind. Such an identity would require close and effective communication if action as a community was at stake. Even at the levels of the political elite, and given their use of a common language, Sanskrit, there appears to have been little communication. During the years when Rajendra Cola was campaigning in the south and the east, Mahmud of Ghazni was attacking the temple towns of north-western India. One would expect that this onslaught on Hinduism, as it is described today, would have found some reference in the court of one who was then the greatest Hindu king. However, such reactions are absent. What is equally curious is that the Kashmiri poet Bilhaṇa, the biographer of the Cālukya king, Vikramāditya VI mentions in the concluding canto of the *Vikramānkadeva-carita* that he visited Somanātha, and goes on to make disparaging remarks about the local Gujaratis but makes no mention of the attack on the temple by Mahmud: and this biography was written about three generations after the attack. Are we not, then, perhaps exaggerating or being imprecise when we talk today about the existence of an all-India Hindu community during those times? There appear, instead, to have been a number of segments largely determined by caste, custom, language and region; and only at certain levels were religious identities recognizable as being similar. For the rest, caste identities probably were more significant and the religious belief systems and actions of particular castes may have had some common features. There was certainly geographical mobility among *brāhmaṇas* and a certain degree of universality among them too, but this was not a Hindu identity in the sense of enveloping people at all levels in all sects. Śankarācārya, for instance, organized a Śaiva *brāhmaṇa* identity which was only a segment of, and did not include the totality, of what is today called a Hindu identity. Even the observance of *varṇa-aśrama-dharma* remained a normative aspiration. Differences of language, customary law and worship kept the segments segregated.

It is important to differentiate between common civilizational symbols, which are recognized over an area, and the consciousness of a community acting towards common social and religious goals. Whereas the former was evident in India the latter appears not to have been so. It is also worth examining the possibly different role of the inter-relation between religion and society in such a caste and sect-based system. Historians have long looked at religions in India, whether indigenous or imported, from the perspective of the teachings of the texts. If religion in the past has to be properly understood, this obviously has to be related to the practice and perceptions of the religious groups. Tolerance and persecution has to do with such perceptions. It is worth noticing, for example, that in the early encounter between religious sects in India and Islam, Muslims were rarely referred to as such. The terms used were either ethnic—Turuṣka/Turk, or geographical—Yavana/West Asian, or the more generalized *mleccha*, meaning impure and covering a wide range of non-Muslims as well. This is a very different perception of 'the other' from what we have tried to make of it by postulating a society divided into Hindus and Muslims.

The Hindu community as an all-India phenomenon identifying itself as a large community encompassing all aspects of 'Hindu' belief and worship, appears to have been a development of recent centuries. The notion may well have been encouraged not only by the adoption of the label 'Hindu', but also by the use of this label by Orientalist and colonial scholarship, which attempted to format Hinduism as an historically evolved religion along the lines of Christianity, and by the demands of political representation as they emerged in the nineteenth century. Here the term Hindu connotes effectively the capturing and claiming of almost all religious belief and practice other than that associated with Islam and Christianity. It bunches together a range of religious sects, some so antithetical to each other that it is difficult to accept them under one label. This perhaps explains how a pre-eminent institution, the Ramakrishna Mission, can claim to be both a Hindu and minority institution.

For such a diverse community to create a uniform cultural tradition for itself can become an exercise in juggling with history. Traditions are not self-created: they are consciously chosen, and the choice from the past is enormous. We tend, therefore, to choose that which suits our present needs. The choice has its own logic and we are perhaps not fully aware of the directions which such choices may take. If we are to understand the role of religion in the Indian society of earlier times we may have to move away from the paradigm of Hinduism and the other religions in India as projected in the colonial period. There has to be an awareness of social relations actually experienced and the representation of these by particular social groups. In the search for a cultural tradition Hindus turn to normative texts and the Brahmanical tradition as the exemplars from the past. This has the advantage that it acts as a kind of all-purpose Sanskritization. But it excludes a large range of both valuable and essential cultural experience. Complex societies have competing value systems and attempts are made by the more established to delete ideologies of protest or of divergent values, as I have tried to show. The awareness of the historical context of a cultural form or an ideological supposition may help us understand that cultural forms change their function over time, both through the internal development of the form and through the imprint of external factors. In other words, cultural forms are embedded in social realities and when we consciously choose a cultural form we should be aware of this reality. It is only then that the choice becomes intelligible.

In this lecture I have attempted to show that we have a variety of beliefs about India's past which have been projected as part of our cultural traditions. We speak of a well-regulated society characterized in all cases by an observance of caste rules, but we pay less attention to instances where these rules were not observed. The latter would go contrary to the tradition, but would provide insights into nuances of social dispositions and perhaps foster a variant tradition about the functioning of society. We see the tradition of renunciation largely as a search for individual salvation with an emphasis on the value of other-worldliness, but miss out the importance of the seemingly contradictory role of the renouncer as a figure of authority in society. We insist on the tradition of tolerance and non-violence as an essential feature of Hindu practice and, by neglecting the evidence to the contrary, diminish our understanding of the religious and social inter-relations of a major part of India's cultural past. This aspect would be further illuminated if we had a more precise historical view of at least the concept of community, instead of assuming its existence in a particular form from earlier times. Communities in contemporary India, be they Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or whatever, seek legitimacy by asserting a long history for their existence. This claim relates closely to our understanding of a secular society in the present. A more precise comprehension of the community in Indian history would clarify some of the problems of the present day as well. Our understanding of all these institutions from the past is closely related to our perceptions of ourselves in the present. It is imperative therefore that historical legitimacy should not be given arbitrarily without first ascertaining its historical viability.

Patronage

In the previous lecture I tried to relate the notion of what we accept as cultural traditions to the historical process within which they have to be viewed. I would now like to take up a few cultural symbols which have conventionally gone into the making of what we regard as some of India's cultural traditions, and look more closely at the levels of meaning which inhere to such symbols. This category of cultural symbols presupposes the creator of the form and the person for whom it is created: a relationship which is founded on the notion of an exchange between the two. It is not an equal exchange, for it often involves that which is tangible with that which is intangible. The exchange hinges on the question of patronage, which is central to the continuity of cultural symbols in society. It also introduces the social manifestations of the symbol.

When we refer to the Indian cultural inheritance we tend to focus on forms of expression, whether it be the crafts, poetry, architecture, values or whatever, and frequently forget the exchange relationships which were crucial to these forms and which imbued them with a social function without which they may not have survived. By social function I do not mean merely the mundane use of an object or form, but rather its multiple role within society. Its survival is inherently tied to the historical process since the cultural symbol changes in accordance with historical change and is rarely static either in form or in social function. We tend today to treat cultural symbols from the past as if they existed in a vacuum, unrelated to space and time and pick out and isolate them in accordance with our contemporary definitions of past culture as well as our present needs. But even traditions are not self-created: they are socially controlled, both in their making as well as in the selection from them of what is required for contemporary purposes. It seems to me, then, that in order to understand the cultural symbol and its role in a tradition, we need to explore more fully the relationship of exchange or patronage involved in the fashioning of the cultural form and its social reference points. If I am not discussing the act of creativity here it is not because I find it unimportant, but because my emphasis for the moment is on different matters.

The definition of patronage is popularly treated as a restricted one: the wealth given by a person of superior status to an artist to enable the latter to produce a work of art. But the act of patronage is neither so restricted nor so simple. It implies a variety of social categories which participate in the making of the cultural object; implicit also is the understanding of the institution which is created from the act of patronage and has social manifestations. It becomes the legitimizer of the patron and, in addition, to a possible role of authority, may take on other social roles. Not least of all is the consideration of the audience to which the act of patronage is directed, which may operate as the arbiter of the patronage in question. Patronage therefore can act as a cultural catalyst.

Let me illustrate this with a few examples.

I would like to begin with the most simple and most direct example of what might be called man-to-man patronage. I am referring to the *dāna-stuti* hymns of the *Ṛg Veda*.[17] A bard composed a hymn in praise of his patron who was often the chief of a clan. The occasion for this was a successful cattle raid against a neighbouring chief or tribe in which the chief and his followers captured a large number of cattle and, preferably, a few herders as well. The occasion was of central importance to a society and economy where a cattle raid was one of the two ways of increasing a herd—the other being breeding. The newly acquired herd was distributed among the clansmen, with doubtless the chief keeping a major share. From this wealth he rewarded the bard who had composed the *stuti* or the eulogy on the chief. And as reward the bard claims to have received lavish gifts of head of cattle and horse, gold, chariots and slave-girls. Hence the seeming man-to-man relationship.

But this relationship had a wider dimension. The bard argued that it was his invocation to the deities which resulted in a victorious raid, and this, together with the eulogy, required a reward from the chief. The gift from the chief was thus his due reward. In the eyes of society the status of the chief was further enhanced by the eulogy. The *stuti* was not only the *rājā*'s claim to fame but it reiterated his right to be a *rājā*. In the act of gift-giving a transference of wealth took place between the chief and the bard which, in a society based on reciprocal economic relations, was a significant act. Not least, such bards claimed that they had bestowed immortality on the chief, and how right they were, for we now know of the existence of these *rājās* largely from the *dāna-stuti* hymns. Those chiefs who were magnanimous in their gifts were held by the bards as models and it was suggested that other chiefs should follow their example.

This nexus between bard and chief receives social sanction and becomes rooted in society. It is incarnated repeatedly when society changes and is germane to the multiplicity of *praśastis* or eulogies in later times, although the form undergoes a mutation. The briefest but most fulsome in praise occur in inscriptions from the Gupta period onwards, with the most famous of the early ones being on Samudragupta. More elaborate forms occur in the biographies of kings referred to as the *carita* literature. The biography of Harsavardhana, the *Harṣa-carita* of Bāṇa, and the later *Vikramānkadeva-carita* of Bilhaṇa whose patron was the Cālukya king Vikramāditya VI, come to mind as better examples of this genre. The *praśastis* were not concerned primarily with recording factual evidence but were involved in the same matters which have been mentioned earlier. The eulogy legitimized the status of the ruler, and this was particularly necessary where the rule of primogeniture had been broken; it underlined the expectations from a just king; it bestowed immortality on the ruler, as is evident from cases where the poet was specially invited to compose the *praśasti*; it recognized the role of poets as part of the royal entourage. Such texts were not meant to be taken literally. In effect, they give us an elaborate view of the courtly culture much prized at that time.

Buried in them, however, was also the genealogical element central to those making claims to status. In a society where status was ostensibly conditioned by birth, it was necessary to claim the highest lineage connections. These were provided to families that had risen politically by genealogists whose authority in relation to their patron was substantial. The eulogy became the rhetoric of this relationship. Since he passed judgement on a man of high status, the bard acquired an independent authority and was regarded as inviolate, and could, if he chose, become the articulator of dissent. His pronouncements on the legitimacy of the king placed him in a sense outside the hierarchy of caste. Thus, in some states of Rajasthan, if he disapproved of the action of the king, the bard would proclaim that he wished to fast unto death—what was called a *dharnā*—and, if he died, the guilt for his death would rest on the king. The king would, in fact, be guilty of the death of his legitimizer. The social reference of the bard in such situations was therefore more than a mere poet composing eulogies. The *praśasti* was not merely a courtly gesture or the creation of a new literary genre, for it carries many other meanings and assumptions. The author was integral to social and political articulation.

I have so far referred to the cultural form as manifest in primarily non-tangible ways. *Stutis* and *praśastis* were largely compositions to be recited and heard, even when they were recorded in writing. I would like to turn to another kind of cultural idiom, the three dimensional form of monuments which are visible on the physical landscape. Monuments from the past are generally regarded as architectural forms encapsulating aesthetic formulae and religious statements and are today evaluated and discussed largely in these terms. But implicit in monuments is a gamut of meanings which need to be made more explicit if the monument is to be fully understood. I would like to take as an example the *stūpa* as a cultural symbol, but, for reasons which I hope will become evident, limit the discussion to the *stūpas* at Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati.[18] The *stūpa* begins as a small commemorative tumulus or one enshrining relics. At this point its social function is limited. However, the change of patronage also changes the scope not only of its aesthetic and religious symbolism but incorporates a range of social statements which give it a meaning additional to that of its original form.

We are so accustomed to giving dynastic labels to everything from the past that, for a long time, such monuments have been described as Śuṅga or Sātavāhana art. Yet the dynasties of the Śuṅgas and the Sātavāhanas were only marginally involved, if at all, with these monuments. The patrons were largely the communities of traders, artisans, guilds of craftsmen, small-scale landowners—the *seṭṭhi-gahapati* families—and monks and nuns and some royal patronage. Mention is made of guilds of ivory carvers and corn dealers, of weavers, potters, perfumers, bead-makers, garland-makers, timber merchants, cloak-makers, blacksmiths, masons and builders.[19] Only a smattering of families from royalty or high political and administrative office are listed. Fortunately, these monuments are studded with votive inscriptions—the pious records of those who contributed towards their construction. Examples of this category of patronage are available from the second century BC to the fourth century A.D. In some cases this form of patronage becomes unique where the craftsmen who actually work on the object of patronage are themselves the patrons, as in the case of the ivory carvers' guild from Vidiśā who sculpted part of the gateways at Sanchi. The themes depicted at these sites were commensurate with the life and aspirations of these social groups. Not surprisingly, stories from *the Jātaka* literature are frequently illustrated.

The link with earlier forms of patronage is at one level the act of gift-giving or *dāna*, although the context of the gift is different in each case. The gift in the earlier system was given by one person to another, not necessarily in a personal capacity, since it was often determined by the status and function of the two persons concerned. Community patronage, which is what distinguishes the particular *stūpa* architecture discussed here, was largely a collection of individual gifts brought together through a religious identity and a more loosely defined social identity. The gift was made initially at least for personal reasons and not because of the requirements of status or function. This possibly changed over time. Donation involved an exchange of a gift (*dāna*) in return for merit (*puṇya*). The gift was a gift of a collectivity but at the same time its record was personalized. The gift went towards the building of a religious institution, the Buddhist *saṅgha*. In the earlier system the patron and the recipient had a reciprocal dependence and the objects exchanged tended to be inalienable. In the case of a gift to the Buddhist *saṅgha* it took the form of wealth or labour, both of which were alienable, and the relation between the donor and the *saṅgha* was voluntary. The significant difference here was the creation of a more tangible cultural form, which became the nucleus of a more complex social institution. Artisans as patrons reflect social mobilization in a period of social change with possibilities of upward mobility. Such patronage points, therefore, to the respect given to artisans, at least by urban society. In contrast to this, the *dharmaśāstras* rate artisans as socially low. Artisan guilds and even financiers' guilds became a feature of the urban landscape during this time. The hereditary recruitment to the guild and endogamous marriage encouraged the conversion of a guild into a *jāti*. Guild donations were, therefore, potentially caste donations, but obviously extending over more than one caste. Some of these artisans and guilds were doubtless also seeking both status and publicity by recording their donations, quite apart from merit. The ivory-carvers' guild which sculpted the gateway at Sanchi may well have achieved renown, and may have been the same which carved some of the exquisite ivory panels so reminiscent of the Sanchi gateway, which found their way to the city of Begram in Afghanistan, a royal centre of the Kuṣāṇas.

Donations were both specific to a monastery as in the case of Kanheri, Karle, Bedsa and the other numerous rock-cut monasteries of the Deccan, as well as more generalized for the benefit of the community, as at the *stūpas* at Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati. In the former, the spectacular *caitya* halls are often surrounded by contrastingly bare monastic cells. Both *stūpa* and monastery encapsulated the power of the *saṅgha* as an institution, and the *stūpa* became its recognized symbol. The sacred structure with its casket of relics was demarcated from profane space by a railing with elaborately sculpted gateways. Contributions towards the construction of the railings and the adorning of gateways was an act of piety involving the entire community of believers. The *saṅgha*, consisting of a body of renouncers, was regarded as an alternative source of authority which governed religious life and some social concerns. When those in political authority were patrons of the building of the *stūpa* they were seeking legitimation from the *saṅgha* apart from their personal piety. When the community as such helped build the *stūpa* it was seeking the protection of this alternative authority as well as invoking it. Monuments therefore were never merely religious or artistic edifices with functions limited to the performance of ritual. Inevitably, there were also levels of authority written into the symbolic understanding of the monument. Such authority was almost tangible where the monument supported a religious institution. Possibly, this may in part account for their vulnerability to attacks from competing religious sects.

The votive inscriptions provide evidence on the wide networks of geographical contacts, indicating yet another dimension to the concept of a Buddhist community. Donors belonged to various parts of the Deccan, although local donations were of course high in number. The location of the monuments along trade routes would point to urban connections or with market centres. Some donations at Karle near Poona came from Buddhist Yavana traders from Afghanistan, and possibly even Egypt as part of what is called the Roman trade with the west coast of India. The extensive geographical net was drawn together by the appeal to a community of common belief, ritual and religious identity.

Other kinds of links were also known. Members of a royal family invested money in a guild, the interest of which went towards financing some aspect of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. Here a different kind of nexus is established which still draws on patronage but of a less obvious kind and brings together royalty, commercial interests and the *saṅgha*. In this case the gift plays a dual role—as donation as well as investment.

One of the more striking aspects of these donations is the number of women donors. Donations from queens and women of the royal family are, of course, known from the early phases of many Buddhist sites. Since it had to include more than a single religious sect, royal patronage, being in theory above the competition for patronage, seems in the early period to have handled the division along gender lines. Where kings presided over *brāhmaṇa yajñas* their wives and sisters made donations to Buddhist monuments as with the Ikṣvākus.

What are however far more notable are the donations of ordinary women to the building and adornment of *stūpas* and *caityas*. These come in larger numbers from the families of small-scale landowners, traders and artisans. In the case of donations of land the names of the women are listed as part of a family. But more generally contributions are linked to individual names. Sometimes the donations are made by husband and wife on other occasions by a mother and son or by sisters, but many are just the names of single women. What is even more interesting is that almost half the women who have recorded their donations individually were nuns, and, indeed, even among male donors large numbers of monks are listed. This raises a host of questions. Did these women share in rights to the family property? In the case of a single woman making a donation, was this part of her *stri-dhana*, the wealth given to her by her mother and over which she in theory had complete control? It seems curious that such records are more frequent in Buddhist and Jaina contexts than in those of other religious sects. The over-ruling of the Buddha's objections to an order of nuns was apparently an act of great foresight. It seems that women had a distinctly better status in the so-called heterodox sects than in Brahmanism. Such women clearly did not regard Sītā as their role model, nor do they appear to have paid much attention to the injunctions of the Manu *Dharmaśāstra* requiring women in every stage of life to be subservient to men. Of course, the association of women with this kind of donation, suggestive of a particular status, is prevalent during a specific time and in relation to a specific objective.

Community patronage of this kind began to decline from the mid-first millennium A.D. I have used the term community in the context of the Buddhist *stūpa* and this may require some explanation. Those that donate to the *stūpa* belong by and large to castes spread across the social spectrum, although the majority belonged to the middle levels of society. The donations collected for the creation and embellishment of the *stūpa* represent a religious community and there are a large number of small donations. There were also other Buddhist monuments built substantially from royal donations, and these would not be included in the category of community patronage, although they were similar in architectural form. The sense of community among the Buddhists saw them as participating in an identity which drew on a uniformly recognized religious practice and belief historically evolved and cutting across segmental differences. This is not to suggest that there were no sectarian differences within Buddhism. But the sects within Buddhism related themselves to a common historically evolved religion, to differences of interpretation of the original teaching, and to the preceding forms of religious practice. Such sects are dissimilar to the sects within Hinduism, many of which have diverse origins, do not necessarily relate to the same set of historical events and some of which repudiated the very texts regarded by others as the foundation of their religion. Even in this case, however, the question which needs to be investigated is whether the Buddhist community, as evident from the votive inscriptions discussed, continued to have the same identity in later periods and in relation to other parts of the country. Possibly this sense of community was tied to particular historical circumstances and, as was often the case with such self-perceptions, may well itself have undergone a change.

In contrast to this Buddhist sense of community, a guild of silk weavers also built a temple to Sūrya in central India, but contributions were collected from only one guild, even though its members were no longer professionally confined to silk weaving.[20] In this case, the notion of community is more limited. It neither includes other guilds nor other worshippers of Sūrya. Royal and aristocratic patronage gradually came to predominate and supersede community patronage. This is noticeable even in the western Deccan at Ellora and Ajanta. The importance of the *stūpa* as a symbol seems to give way slowly to *caitya* halls and *viharas*. The new patronage, being very substantial, enabled the maintenance of large monasteries. It was this, again, which became the pattern in eastern India, with Nalanda financed by the endowment of a hundred if not two hundred villages, and other monastic centres such as Vikramaśīla and Paharpura equally well off. The smaller collections made by traders and artisans were giving way to the lavish endowments of royalty. The focus shifted to strengthening the monastic establishment. The *saṅgha* therefore, had now to function to a greater extent than before as a landowner and a propertied institution. As such, it came into competition with other religious institutions which were also receiving endowments from royalty, namely, the temples of various Hindu sects.

The genesis of the temple appears to have been a small shrine-room housing an image as the nucleus of a cult. This is suggested by one of the earliest examples of the Gupta period located in the shadow of the Sanchi *stūpa*. The single room acquired adjoining structures. With the conversion of a cult into a sect with a following, and the patronage of local political authority also thrown in, the small shrine evolved into the complex structure associated with Hindu temples. The temple comes to dominate the landscape when it takes the form of a structure as determined by architects, builders and craftsmen—the *sūtradhāra*, *sthāpati* and *śilpin*.

As with the *stūpa*, it is initially an architectural form built to identify a place of worship. But from the moment of its expansion it takes on the qualities of a social symbol and, in many cases, a very complicated one.

The Simhachalam temple in the Vishakhapatanam district of Andhra Pradesh is one such example.[21] Its history and function is by no means unique, nor is it the largest of temples. It is merely one among many others in the country, and its evolution follows a pattern which, in its broad outline, is repeated elsewhere in the late first and early second millennium A.D. It arose in the proximity of Buddhist structures and is said to be located at the site of one. A number of Hindu temples have Buddhist sites lurking in their foundations. The earliest votive inscription of the eleventh century is that of a merchant. But in the subsequent five centuries merchant donations are few, and the five hundred and odd inscriptions on its walls recording donations are largely of members of royal families of the various dynasties which ruled in the area, their ministers and commanders—the *mahāpātras* and *senāpatis*—their officers and their feudatories, a different clientele from those of the Buddhist *stūpas* of the Deccan. The eleventh century temple was destroyed in the thirteenth century and even its inscribed stones were used as building material for the new temple at the site. Thus, some of the earlier records were built casually into the walls of the new temple and are lost to us. The district saw a fast turn-over of political authorities, the Cālukya-Colas, Eastern Gaṅgas, Kākatīyas, Gajapatis, Vijayanagara and eventually the Sultans of Golconda in the late sixteenth century. Dynastic changes are evident not only from the votive inscriptions but also from the mixture of architectural styles from Orissa, Telengana and the southern styles, and from the iconographical features of the wide ranging images with mutations tied both to sculptural injunction and local beliefs.

A complaint was taken to the Sultan of Golconda that Muslim soldiers had vandalized the temple. The Sultan sent an officer to sort out the matter and make endowments for the *brāhmaṇas* attached to the temple and reactivate it. In the late eighteenth century there were a series of Maratha raids in the area and it is not clear from the records whether the temple was safe from them. There is a conspicuous absence of any Maratha donations.

In the nineteenth century parts of the earlier thirteenth century soft-stone structures began to decay and damaged the temple, requiring extensive repairs. Local opinion now insists that these repairs were required because the temple was damaged by 'the Muslims'.

The central shrine room houses a curious image of Varāha-Narasiṃha Viṣṇu. The image was originally a Śiva-liṅgam. But, after an extended visit from Rāmānuja, the temple was converted to Vaiṣṇavism. The *sthala-purāṇa* of the temple relates the story that he ordered the existing *lingam* to be cut and sculpted to the form of Viṣṇu Narasiṃha. Halfway through this process the icon began to bleed and, in great fear, the sculptors appealed to Rāmānuja, who then ordered them to stop their work. Hence it remains an incomplete image, and when it is covered with sandal-paste, as it is most of the time, it continues to look like a *lingam*.

The thirteenth-century temple boasted of a vestibule, a porch, an assembly-hall, a *nātya maṇḍapam* and a variety of halls for special festivals, not to mention a surround of shrines to subsidiary deities. The treasury where the substantial jewels of the deities were kept adjoined the temple, and beyond the outer courtyard were the temple tanks, the gardens and the structures which housed the vehicles of the deity.

Donations to the temple endowed it with extensive assets. The large acreages of arable land were leased out to tenants. Revenue had to be collected from these, as also from the villages which the temple received as endowments. In some instances, this revenue permitted the temple to act as a bank—not only for rural credit but also to finance trading guilds. The daily offerings of cash and jewels had to be registered. All this required a large number of functionaries. The head of the temple was given the appropriate title of *bhoga parīkṣā* and he was both the religious head as well as the superintendent or *adhikāri* of the administration of the temple. The rituals were performed by a body of priests and mention is made of thirty *brāhmaṇas* in this category. The assistants who helped them with the ritual were distinct from the pandits and the *adhyāpakas* who recited the purāṇic and epic texts. Their number had reached fifty-two in the nineteenth century. Lower down the social scale were the musicians, torch bearers and the *devadāsis*, and of the latter mention is made of one hundred in the thirteenth century. The administration of the temple had a separate hierarchy of office-bearers, including the treasurer/*bhaṇḍāri*, accountants/*śrikarnams*, goldsmiths, stonemasons, carpenters and iron smiths, as also those employed as attendants and palanquin bearers, sweepers and cleaners, elephant keepers, *śūdras* who cultivated the flower gardens as well as herdsmen from the tribe of the Boyas to tend the many thousand heads of cattle and sheep owned by the temple. Religious and administrative offices were hereditary and incumbents were paid with endowments of land or a share of the offerings.

The temple was, in fact, a large estate employing hundreds of people in various capacities. Not surprisingly, the ritual treated the chief deity as comparable to a dominant landowner in the *jajmani* system. The economic assets were held in the name of the deity and the employees performed services for the deity. The social hierarchy was perhaps more easily maintained in a system of service relationships. Power was enhanced where the temple authorities not only collected taxes but also exercised judicial rights. Additional income came in at the time of fairs and festivals and from pilgrims. The temple was often the major agricultural entrepreneur of the region, bringing new land under cultivation. Commerce was also encouraged, not only by the markets catering to pilgrims from various places, but also by traders bringing in exotic items, such as perfumes, musk, rosewater and camphor to be used in ritual.

The temple, therefore, represented a continuum of functional and symbolic meanings. For some it was the cosmic body of the deity or the cosmic form of the universe. Its architecture and sculpture were the articulation of theories on aesthetics and iconography. The music and dance of the *devadāsis* were integrated into musicology and, at another level, the *devadāsis* were regarded as sacred concubines. The *maṭhas* attached to the temple for training the priests developed into centres of sectarian activity as well as centres for formal education and debate. The recitation of the epic, *purāṇa*, *kathā* and *kāvya* to audiences of pilgrims and devotees assisted the process of interaction and the assimilation of the 'high' culture with the local culture. For the devotee, the temple was a sanctified place of worship. For the king it was both a place of worship and a source of legitimation. This led to successive rulers from a variety of dynasties recording a donation on the temple walls. It became a nucleus of loyalty to the king, and this was particularly necessary where there was a fast change of fortunes among royal families. As a nucleus of loyalty it would draw not only on the institution but also on the networks of devotees and pilgrims. And who with any political sense does not know that the loyalty of local factions is of the utmost importance in building a political base? So great was the need for this political base that a military outpost was established at the temple as early as the eleventh century.

The state saw the temple as a revenue collecting institution as well, and, even if the revenue did not come to the state, the amount was so large and the management of cash and endowments so complex, that it required some state supervision. The Gaṅga dynasty therefore established a high-ranking officer to supervise the fiscal and administrative work of the temple functionaries and act as a liaison between the temple and its royal patrons. It has thus been argued that the temple became a political outpost of the Gaṅgas.

Inscriptions on a temple wall are legal documents recording the property rights and administrative functioning of the temple. The recording of donations from royalty and from officers of the upper levels of administration was as much symbolic of their political supremacy as of their religious identity. The temple as an institution was a recipient of a transfer of wealth, and this exchange in the form of patronage established a reciprocal relationship between those who ruled and required legitimation to rule and those who provided the legitimation and were supported financially by their patrons. This was in a sense a more complicated projection of the rather simple relationship which I referred to at the start of the lecture, namely, that between the bard and the chief via the *dānastuti*. Whether the form was that of the eulogy or the *stūpa* or the temple, in each case it was the act of patronage which was germinal to the creation of a form and a set of relationships.

A temple was more than a place of worship. It was an institution and, as such, paralleled the *saṅgha* and acquired a status similar to that of the dominant property owners of the time. It could house a deity who on occasion would be regarded as the suzerain overlord by the reigning king and thus acted as a further source of legitimacy. The Gaṅgas are known to refer to themselves as the feudatories—*rauta*—of Jagannath at Puri. Temple ritual imitated the daily routine of the royal household and the deity was treated at least as a feudal chief if not the overlord. As an institution, and through the services it required, it integrated a hierarchy of castes from *brāhmaṇas* to *śūdras* with each one assigned its duties related as closely as possible to the normative rules of the *dharmaśāstra* texts. Possibly, only in the institution of the temple were the normative texts sought to be literally applied. It also reiterated strongly the segregation advised by the normative texts and prohibited the untouchables entry to its sacred precincts.

The temple was a recognized social institution which sought, however, a special sanction for protection as a sacred centre. Such a sanction was generally conceded. But on occasion it was not. When a king was in a political or financial crisis he might loot the temples: a case in point being the king of Kashmir, Harṣadeva, who in the eleventh century faced a fiscal crisis and decided to despoil the temples in his kingdom in order to obtain their abundant wealth. He appointed a special officer, the *devotpāṭana-nāyaka*, to do so.[22] Alternatively, the richer temples became the target for greedy Turks and Afghans who seized their wealth. In other instances, where the acquisition of wealth had less priority, the attack on the temple may well have been for religious reasons or else arising out of social or political hostility, as possibly in the case of the Vīraśaivas, or of Aurangzeb. In such cases religion is used to validate a variety of causes. Inevitably for the historian, the temple is more than just a place with a religious identity, and when temples are attacked the reasons can be manifold. The transformation of the original, simple *deva-griha* housing the deity, which was the genesis of the temple, into what was often called the *prāsāda* or palace touched many levels of social, political and economic existence other than the obviously religious. What may be functionally religious can have other functions as well which supersede the sect and speak to the society.

I have discussed three distinct cultural categories—the *praśasti* or eulogy, the *stūpa* and the temple. These are frequently referred to when we speak today of India's cultural heritage from the past. I have tried to suggest that, common to them all, is the interaction between the creator of the cultural idiom and the patron, that the idiom itself is not independent of this relationship, but that in this process an institution is born which has a wide social relevance. By institution I do not mean only a public organization, but an integrated, organized behaviour-pattern through which social control is exercised. This comes to include the recognition of a social reference point which evolves out of the existence of the form, but may not originally have been envisaged as part of the form. The bard or the poet is seemingly only concerned with the *rājā*, but his composition as a *praśasti* becomes a cultural form. This, in turn, reflects on the role of the bard in relation to the *rājā*, and also fixes certain functions of the bard in society where the bard becomes the legitimizer of the king but can, also, for this reason, articulate a protest against the king. The trader and the artisan are concerned with the *saṅgha*, but both the *stūpa* and the nature of donations to it impinge on a large range of social concerns, involving the status of the donor as well as the function of the *saṅgha* in society, which function changes when the donors change. I have tried to show that it gives expression to a range of actual articulation which goes beyond just the aesthetic or religious appeal of the *stūpa* or *caitya*. A king donates wealth for a temple built by an architect. From this is born a parallel institution to existing ones, with a multiplicity of social roles. The temple has a horizontal nexus with its patrons which is based on a relatively equal exchange of wealth for legitimation and the social recognition of piety. But it also has a vertical nexus with those who keep it going, which endorses and legitimizes a hierarchy of unequal status and dependence, as well as an inequality of social access to the goods and services of the temple. The temple, therefore, has also to be seen as an institution, as was the *saṅgha* earlier, and has to be assessed as a social and political statement apart from its religious function. In each case a new cultural idiom is created, a new cultural signal. But our recognition, comprehension and acceptance of this signal should go beyond the creator and the patron, and should include a recognition of its social reference point. In our present-day recognition of the idiom we frequently neglect the institution which it gives rise to and interpret the signal in too narrow a way. An understanding of the signal involves more than just an appreciation of its religious or aesthetic form.

In the three examples which I have discussed, patronage in each case picks up a seminal form and develops it almost to the point of losing the original. It encapsulates within it a relationship of exchange, which not only relates the patron to the object of patronage but introduces a further relationship between the object and society. This relationship has many manifestations and often goes beyond what may originally have been the purpose of the object.

Each of these three examples also supports three distinct notions of authority which were prevalent in the Indian past and which, it has been argued, are among its civilizational symbols. The eulogy focuses on political authority. The *stūpa* draws on the institution of *bhikkhus* or renouncers who, on joining the order, discontinued their normal social obligations but created an alternative society. The temple symbolizes the authority of the priestly function. These notions of authority were distinct, but there was some overlap in the practice of this authority: the bard had in part a status similar to that of the renouncer in as much as he was often seen as outside the normal hierarchy of caste and, at the same time, evolved a ritual which gave him a special sanction: the alternative society of the renouncer gave rise to a kind of moral authority which could impinge on social behaviour and political action: the priest drew strength from investing political authority with elements of divinity and used the sanction of ritual and worship to control social action. These were civilizational symbols whose outer forms varied somewhat when dynasties changed or new religions were introduced or when new kinds of political action were required. But the message of the symbol rather than its literal form constituted a continuity in Indian history. Such symbols reach out to many manifestations of social and individual life. To confine them to merely the aesthetic or the religious or the purely formal is to fail to comprehend them in their totality.

I have tried to show that a cultural form has its own history and that its mutation is related to changing historical contexts. To see it as part of a historical continuum provides nuances which introduce a variety of insights into the form. I have given only a partial view of such insights. Added to this, the redefinition of the concept of culture encourages an emphasis on the social context in which a cultural form is placed. This provides fresh perspectives and reinforces the significance of the historical process to the understanding of cultural traditions and symbols.

The keepers and recorders of the past are in greater demand when groups, communities and societies are searching for identities. For each of these there are critical points in time when, for various reasons, identities have to be clarified, sharpened and given a direction. Cultural identities may seem innocuous, but more often than not, are equally strongly motivated as other identities, since, in effect, they incorporate social behaviour and actions. Groups in society select and propagate those cultural symbols which they can control.

Our selection of cultural forms today has been inevitably conditioned by the historical experience of the last two centuries. The projection was based on an image of an ideal society closely observing normative texts. The cultural traditions so selected emphasized upper-caste values, other-worldliness, religious tolerance and a rather simplistic notion of a community, all of which were taken back to an early past. The current re-assertion of cultural identities directed towards the needs of nation-building requires of us a deeper analysis of cultural traditions and symbols. It is not sufficient that we echo and re-echo what has been said in the past few decades. This becomes particularly relevant when culture as defined in a narrow sense is sought to be made the basis of a national identity. This may facilitate a simple definition of national culture, but its narrowness may distort the definition.

Let me, then, repeat that we should be aware of the cultural traditions which we are creating and what goes into the making of a tradition: that normative values have to be juxtaposed with social reality if we are to understand the contribution of each; that the study of alternative traditions will provide us with a clearer image even of what we regard as established traditions and the manner in which they relate to others; that the selection of symbols which are constituted into a tradition are seldom random and generally have a purpose which should not go unnoticed; that such cultural symbols are not solely aesthetic forms or religious forms but have a social reference point.

The continuity of culture, therefore, cannot be viewed merely as some kind of mystic communication from one generation to another, where the people involved are mute recipients. When cultural traditions seek legitimacy from history, thereby imprinting themselves on the perception of the present, and are used as building blocks in the construction of contemporary identities, then the voice of the historian has perforce to be heard.

Notes

* The Qureishi Memorial Lectures, Delhi University, 1986. Published in *History and Beyond*, New Delhi, OUP, 2000.

1. *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 14.6.6; *Bṛhad-devatā*, 4.11–15; 21.25; *Ṛg Veda* 1.58.
2. *Mahābhārata*, Ādi parvan, 57.56.
3. R. Thapar, 'Genealogy as a Source of Social History', in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi 1978, pp. 326–60.
4. *Mahābhārata*, Ādi parvan, 63ff.
5. R. Thapar, 'Householders and Renouncers in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Tradition', in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Way of Life*, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 273–98. See chapter 7 in this volume.
6. R. Thapar, 'Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-Culture?' in *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi 1978, pp. 63–104. See chapter 6 in this volume.
7. E.g. K. A. Nilakantha Sastri, *The Cholas*, Madras 1955, pp. 636, 645.
8. *Si-yu-ki*- I. 168, 171.
9. *Rājatrtaraṅginī*, I. 289, 307.
10. D. Desai, 'Placement and Significance of Erotic Sculptures at Khajuraho', in Michael Meister (ed.), *Discourses on Siva*, Bombay 1984, pp. 143–55.
11. K. Vellaivaranan, *The First Seven Tirumunis*, Annamalai 1972, pp. 143–4; K. R. Srinivasan, 'South India', in A. Ghosh (ed.), *Jaina Art and Architecture*, Vol. II, New Delhi 1975; R. Champakalakshmi. 'Religious Conflict in the Tamil Country', *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol. IV. 1978.

12. P. B. *Desai, Jainism in South India*, Mysore 1957, pp. 82–3, 401–2, 24.
13. M. A. Dhaky, personal communication. See also James Burgess, Report of the First Season's operations in the Belgam and Kaladgi Districts, Jan. to May 1874, *ASWI*, No. 1, reprint Varanasi 1971, p. 12.
14. *Epigraphia Indica*, V. p. 237.
15. P. B. Desai, *Jainism in South India*.
16. S. B. Deo, 'Expansion of Jainism', in A. Ghosh (ed.), *Jain Art and Architecture*, Vol. II.
17. As, for example, Ṛg *Veda*, 8.5; 6.27; 8.46; 10.9; 8.1; 1.126; 10.107.
18. J. Marshall and A. Foucher, *Monuments of Sanchi*, Vols. I–III, Calcutta 1940.
19. *Epigraphia Indica*, V. Lüders' List of Inscriptions. See inscriptions from Bharhut and Amaravati.
20. Mandasor Inscription. J. F. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, Varanasi 1970 (reprint), pp. 79ff.
21. K. Sundaram, *The Simhachalam Temple*, Waltair 1969.
22. *Rājataraṅginī*, VII, 1081–1095.

14

*Patronage and the Community**

The concept of patronage is usually restricted to the relationship between the patron and the recipient of patronage—often visualized for early times as the king and the artist who works for him. But the relationship created through the act of patronage can vary considerably according to the form of patronage. The patron, the artist and the object are pointers to each other and are deeply interlinked. Art historians of India generally looked for an individual patron and this in part explains the frequency with which monuments are labelled by dynasty and rarely by the name of the architect even when this is known. Further, the recipient is often regarded as subservient to the patron since the former is dependent for his livelihood on the latter. This focus obstructs the consideration of what the patron receives in return for extending patronage.

The act of patronage is initially an exchange. Over time the categories of persons involved in this exchange as well as the objects may change. Often the exchange involves intangibles such as status and legitimation or the acquisition of merit, in return for tangible wealth. The activity involved in patronage includes a number of concerns such as, the occasion, the formal relationship by which it is recognized, the patron, the recipient, the object which encapsulates the acts and the function of the act. Among these the relationship between the patron and the recipient sets the tone as it were, for acts of patronage. Such a relationship can perhaps be categorized into at least four significant forms.[1] Firstly, patronage which is embedded in a society and where the patron and recipient are built into the system as it were, as for example the chief and the bard in chiefdoms or early forms of kingship. Secondly, patronage as a deliberate act of choice can be seen when a community decides to donate wealth and labour towards the building of a monument which encapsulates its religious beliefs, social values and activities and where the patron is not a single person but a recognizable group. Thirdly, the most familiar form of patronage is where it becomes a service, where the recipient is either a retainer or is commissioned by a patron and this form is frequently found in the relations between a court, a religious institution or a powerful household, each of which may commission an individual or a group to produce an object generally of artistic value. Finally, in more recent times patronage can be seen as a public activity where, for the world of art, the object becomes an investment and artists are more evidently changing style and aesthetics but the material value of the object is still determined by the patrons.

This essay is concerned primarily with the second form of patronage, namely that which involves a community donating wealth towards the building of monuments and their adornment as acts of piety. However since the first of the four categories listed above, that of embedded patronage, contains elements of community patronage, although not particularized as such, it might be useful to consider the difference between the first and the second forms if only to focus on their social concerns.

Embedded patronage can be of at least two varieties. One is the relationship of the bard to the *rājā*/chief and the other is that of the *yajamāna*—the one ordering a sacrifice, to the priests. The first can be relatively more focussed on social and political relationships or on occasion tied to a ritual but where the ritual aspect is not dominant. The occasion for the second has to be a ritual. The bard performing multiple roles acted as the legitimizer of power, the moral conscience of those in power and the 'historian'. This is demonstrated in the *dāna-stuti* hymns (in praise of gift-giving) of the *Ṛg Veda*[2] where the bard composes eulogies on the prowess of the *rājā* in cattle raids and skirmishes with other chiefs and in return for his compositions receives cattle, horses, chariots and gold as wealth. The occasion could be the *vidatha* or any other clan assembly with some degree of ritual connotation, the patron was the *rājā*, the recipient was the bard or the *brāhmaṇa* hymnodist, the object was the gift given by the *rājā* and the purpose or function of this exchange was the eulogizing of the *rājā*, which acted as a form of validation and of historical memory. This form of patronage is more commonly found in lineage-based societies prior to the emergence of the state or in what are sometimes called early states (Thapar 1978, pp. 105ff, 1984). However it does not die down completely with the establishing of the monarchical state. At least one aspect continues into the new system. Poets attached to a court and composing eulogies on the king were in a sense continuing this tradition. Thus, much of the *carita* literature of later times, where it relates to royal biographies, such as the *Harṣacarita* of Bāna-bhaṭṭa or the *Vikramānkadevacarita* of Bilhaṇa were, as literary forms, descendants of the *dāna-stutis.*

The *yajamāna* on a ritual occasion is also performing an act of patronage and to that extent Vedic texts as ritual texts are also, in certain passages, manuals of patronage. The word *śilpa* in the Vedic context meant a skill and even the performance of a *yajña* could be seen as a *śilpa*. The occasions are the major ritual sacrifices, such as the *cāturmāsya* and the seasonal sacrifices, as well as the *yajñas* linked to the status and power of the *rājā*, such as the *abhiṣeka, rājasūya, aśvamedha* and *vājapeya*. The seasonal rituals held in households were essentially domestic where the *gṛhapati* or the head of the household was the patron and the *brāhmaṇa* performing the ritual was the recipient. The object encapsulating patronage was the cow or the gold given by the *gṛhapati* to the *brāhmaṇa* and the exchange ensured the well-being of the *gṛhapati* and his family and reiterated his status.

In the case of royal rituals, the *yajña* itself constituted the form with the *rājā* as patron, the categories of priests—*hotṛ, adhvaryu, netṛ, brāhmaṇa*, and so on—as recipients; material wealth such as cattle, horses, and gold was the tangible exchange for ensuring the well-being of the clan and the power of the *rājā* and of intervening with the gods to make certain of this function. Gift-giving, together with the display and destruction of wealth became a means of claiming status and marginally redistributing wealth.

The system as such continued into later periods with some adaptations. The *mahārājādhirājas* of the centuries AD performed the *mahāyajñas*, the elaborate, large scale sacrificial rituals. This was particularly the case where there might have been a disputed succession or where a family of obscure origin aspired to dynastic status, claimed to be *kṣatriyas* and established kingdoms, practices which are more easily recognised from the post-Gupta period. It is not altogether unexpected that when later the *jajmāni* system of service relationships came into being in some areas, the pattern was similar. The occasion was calendrical services in the form of routine functions, the patron was the *yajamāna*, often a landowner, the recipients were those who performed largely routine services for him, the object was payment in kind and the function was production and consumption. When the pattern of the latter was altered the system also changed. The *jajmān* could be an individual landowner or a temple or institution holding property in land. *Jajmāni* also referred to a method of organizing skills, relationships and wealth. The skills would centre around services, the relationship around protection by the *jajmān* and the legitimizing of the *jajmān* by the recipients. The term *jajmān* evokes the flavour of ritual which is extended to the notion of service, the interdependence of patron and recipient, the perception among his peers of the recipient being a model, the possible exploitation of the recipient by the patron and the occasional manipulating of the patron by the recipients as innovators and conservers of skill.

In all these situations the act of patronage not only creates a new (often tangible) object, but it also creates an institution, irrespective of whether it is minuscule or on a grand scale. The legitimation of political authority for example, also gives rise to the question of politically acceptable channels of dissent and political opposition. Thus in the second millennium AD, the bard in Rajasthan was also the articulator of political protest against the *rājā*. This was expressed in a *dharnā*, in this case a fast unto death. The guilt associated with the death of the bard would be so extreme that kings tended to negotiate an agreement before this could happen (Ziegler 1976).

Embedded patronage therefore has a further life in various forms, some overt and some subordinated. As such it constitutes a counterpart to the more apparent community patronage which becomes evident at the turn of the Christian era in some parts of the subcontinent. Here, the act of patronage is a freshly thought out, conscious act, initially regarded as extraneous to other social and religious activities. There is nevertheless a link between the two which lies in the act of making a gift—*dāna*—although the context of the gift is very different in each case. *Dāna* in the earlier system is a gift made from one person to another, not necessarily in a personal capacity since it was often determined by the status of the two persons and the occasion when it was given.

Community patronage in the early period took the form of *dāna* given by a group of people who came together primarily because of a common and closely defined religious identity and a more loosely defined social identity. That the social identity could assume an importance was always possible and in some cases evident, especially where it coincided with particular religious manifestations. The gift was therefore initially made for personal reasons and because of requirements of status or function. Once the institution emanating from this form of patronage was established and began to indicate a social role, at that later stage the making of donations may have taken on the function of a social statement. The *dāna* given by the *yajamāna* was an individual's gift but not necessarily personalized. With community patronage, the gift is neither destroyed in a potlatch type of ritual nor does it go directly towards enhancing the personal wealth of the religious intermediary. The gift in the system under discussion here is appropriated by the *saṅgha*. Another major difference is that in the earlier system the patron and the recipient were in a condition of reciprocal dependence and the objects exchanged tended to be inalienable (Gregory 1982). In the case of *dāna* to the *saṅgha*, the gift took the form of wealth or labour, both of which were alienable and the relation between the donor and the *saṅgha* was voluntary.

Community patronage involves social relations and a conscious act of exchange. The act of patronage asserts the status of the patrons and in addition articulates the cohesion of the community making the donation. Examples of this category of patronage become evident during the period from the second century BC to the fourth century AD in the patronage extended to the building of *stūpas* such as those at Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati and the rock cut caves of the Western Deccan, all of which had at source donations to the Buddhist *saṅgha*.[3] The donations came substantially from artisans, guilds of craftsmen, traders, monks and nuns, small scale landowners and to a lesser extent from royalty and families in high political and administrative office. In some cases this form of patronage becomes unique, where the craftsmen who actually work on the object of patronage are themselves the patrons, as in the case of the ivory carvers guild from Vidiśā who sculpted a part of the gateway at Sanchi (*Ep. Ind.* II, p. 378, No. 200). Such monuments stand in contrast to many of the *stūpas* of north-western India of approximately the same period which were more frequently built with royal patronage.

Artisans as patrons indicate social mobilization in a period of social change with possibilities of upward mobility. Such patronage reflects the respect meted out to artisans who were wealthy as is also indicated in Buddhist texts where a *gṛhapati/gahapati* even in an artisanal profession would be given the status of *ucchakula*, or high family (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III, 363). This, notwithstanding that in contemporary Brahmanical *dharmaśāstras* they are ranked low (Gautama X.60; Manu X.99–100; or even the *Arthaśāstra* 1.3.8). Weavers for example in later texts, were regarded as *antyajas*, lower than the *śūdra* (Alberuni I, pp. 101–2). Is this to be explained by the argument that when weaving declined as a trade, the impoverishment of weavers led to a lowering of their status, or, was the lowering of the status due to the weavers supporting religious sects which the *brāhmaṇas* regarded as heretical?

The establishment of artisan guilds becomes a noticeable feature of urban life from the Mauryan period onwards. The evolution of guilds/*śreṇīs* can be traced to settlements in the proximity of raw materials and villages of craftsmen concerned with a specific craft such as weaving or carpentry, some of which villages grew into *nigamas* or market centres. Specialized areas demarcated for particular crafts remained the norm in urban settlements as well. The structure of the guild as it gained importance was further emphasized by its increasingly hereditary nature. Where endogamous marriage was encouraged it led ultimately to the *śreṇī* taking on some of the functions of caste and some *śreṇīs* came to be viewed as *jātis* in the first millennium AD. Guild donations were therefore up to a point caste donations as well and the *jātis* which collectively donated to the building of a monument did not see themselves as sharply differentiated in social terms.

Patronage is indicated either directly through votive inscriptions which identify the donor and his or her contribution or indirectly in the sculptured panels of donors as for example the *daṃpati* groups at Karle. Buddhist monuments, be they *caitya*-hall, *stūpa*, cave or cistern at a monastery site, are the objects of patronage. The patrons consist substantially of the *gahapati/gṛhapati* and the *seṭṭhi/śreṣṭhin* (families of wealthy landowners and traders), of artisans, of the guilds or *śreṇīs* and just occasionally a *rājā* or his wife and a high status officer and/or his wife. Apart from this there is also a large body of monks and nuns. The recipient is the Buddhist *saṅgha*. The medium is presumably a monetary contribution or a voluntary contribution in labour which helped in the making of the monument as the object encapsulating the act of patronage. The function is the acquisition of merit or *punya* which helped to bring individuals closer to *nirvāṇa*.

The purpose of gift-giving was in part concerned with personal salvation and not altogether uninfluenced by material benefits (*Mahāvastu* II, 363–97). *Dāna* is referred to as the most meritorious act, the other two being *sila* and *bhāvanā*. *Dāna* is particularly meritorious when given to a *bhikkhu* or to the *saṅgha*. Ideally *dāna* consisted of those items of food, clothing and daily life which would meet the *bhikkhu's* minimum requirements (*Dīgha Nikāya* 3.218; *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 4.239, 246). The act of gift-giving therefore was imbued with a sacred quality in addition to its function in maintaining *bhikkhus*. When the act of *dāna* consisted of money or labour to embellish a *stūpa*, then obviously it underwent a change from its earlier function and became less an act of maintaining a monk and more that of faith in the *saṅgha*, for the *stūpa* was seen as one of the physical symbols of the *saṅgha*.

The *stūpa* becomes the symbol of the power of the *saṅgha* in relation to the patron. It emerges as a major symbol when the worship of sacred sites *per se* gives way to monuments as the physical manifestation of the *saṅgha* as an institution. Whereas in the early Pāli canon the *vihāras* or monasteries are more frequently mentioned, the archaeology of the post-Mauryan period refers to the *stūpa* and the *caitya* as the major edifices. The *vihāras* which have survived from these times tend to be rock-cut monasteries. Here the *caitya*-halls are the most spectacular expression of patronage often surrounded by clusters of contrastingly bare rock-cut cells and the occasional water cisterns. The free-standing *stūpa* becomes a focal monument which is adorned and enclosed within a railing demarcating the sacred from the profane. There is a distinction between those objects of patronage which are intended to benefit both monks and nuns and the laity and those intended only for the former. Contributions towards the construction of the railings and the adorning of the gateways and pillars of the *stūpa*, was an act of piety involving the entire community of believers. The rock-cut *vihāra* intended only for monks was a particularized act of piety. The patrons, both in the *Jātaka* stories and in the votive inscriptions tend to come from the same social groups and there is therefore a considerable reinforcing of the identification of these patrons.

The location and symbolism of the *stūpa* has its own importance. There has been some debate on the question of whether the *stūpa* was worshipped as a symbol of the *mahāparinirvāṇa* or whether it was the *nirvāṇa* body of the Buddha. The cult of the *stūpa* came into prominence after the death of the Buddha and it has been argued that this was more conducive to Mahāyāna than to Hīnayāna Buddhism (Ebert 1980). The early tradition suggests a funerary connection, the location being marked by a man-made tumulus. In peninsular India Buddhist sites often occur on or near megalithic burials as at Amaravati, pointing to continuity in areas regarded as sacred and associated with the dead. This sense of continuity also extended to the community which in the first instance built the megalithic structure and later to the Buddhist religious community. This might be a clue to the origin of the inexplicable word *eḍuka/eluka* believed to be of Dravidian etymology and used for *stūpa* in some Sanskrit and Pāli sources (see discussion by B.N. Goswamy in Dallapiccola 1980). The association of the *stūpa* as a symbol of the Buddha when he is described as a *cakkavati* provides yet another level of meaning. Possibly the *stūpa* also symbolized an alternative source or centre of power. Thus when those in political authority were patrons of the building of a *stūpa* they would be subsuming this alternative power; and when the community as such helped build the *stūpa* it would be calling on this alternative source of power for protection. Implicit in the gift therefore is not only the seeking of merit which is the more obvious reciprocation but also the calling upon the Buddha for protection.

The intention of the patrons is at one level clearly stated. The contribution was an exchange of *dāna* for *punya*, a gift for the acquisition of merit. This could be either individual or collective as in the case of the guild and ultimately a collaborative act if the end result was the building of a *stūpa* or *caitya-hall*. There were also a variety of subsumed intentions and some degree of social mobilization can be inferred. Here local chiefs were involved, such as the Mahābhoja or the Mahatalāvara; these were also persons who occur in the Sātavāhana inscriptions as high-ranking officers suggesting a transfer of chiefly authority to administrative purposes (Ray 1986). The most frequently mentioned groups are of course the *seṭṭhi-gahapati* families obviously of some standing as landowners and traders. The emphasis in some cases on the donation of a family where the kin relations are specifically stated as in some Amaravati inscriptions is of interest. Does this reflect the reinforcing of the family as a relatively new unit of social identity in areas of erstwhile clan domination? Equally important are the contributions of monks and nuns mentioned by name. This is surprising in a community where monastic rules tended to blur individual identities and where monks and nuns were not expected to have access to wealth. Was this the wealth which accompanied them on entry into the monastery and which they donated to the *saṅgha*? Or did they continue to hold shares in family property and were therefore permitted to maintain a private income? Or did they invest this income in the trade which passed along the routes on which their monasteries were situated arguing that the profits from such investments would be donated to the *saṅgha*?

The identification of the donor is not necessary to an act of piety or of worship. It becomes necessary when such an act is a public declaration of belief and incidentally also a statement on wealth and status. Were votive inscriptions also inspired by a desire to be known to posterity particularly in a culture which did not commemorate the ordinary mortal through grave-stones or memorial stones? This is in part suggested not only by the close association of some Buddhist sites with megalithic burial sites but also by certain aspects of the Buddhist sites as well. For instance there is a burial gallery at Kanheri where small votive *stūpas* were built to commemorate dead *theras* believed to have achieved a high state of realization (Gokhale 1985). Even for the living, votive inscriptions were advertisements of the status of individuals and families or the status of professions when guilds were constituted, drawing attention to the skills and the quality of craftsmanship. Urban professionals such as ivory-carvers, weavers, potters, perfumers, bead-makers and garland makers are often mentioned. More specifically Ānanda, the foreman of the artisans of Siri Satakani, the Sātavāhana king, states that he carved the top architrave of the south gate at Sanchi (Lüders 346;[4] Cunningham p. 264, No. 190) or the *rūpakara* Buddharakhita of Bharhut (Lüders 857) or the *vadhaki* Svamin of Dhenukākaṭa (Burgess and Indraji p. 30, No. 6). In parallel situations mention is made of an actor's sons, the Candaka brothers, involved in the temple of Dadhikarna Nāga (*Ep. Ind.* I, p. 390, No. 18). Even better known is the reference from Mathura to Gomataka a pupil of Kunika, the sculptor of the famous Parkham *yakṣa* image (Lüders 150). This might also signify a break away from the guild to the setting up of a family identity of craftsmen or at least a *guru-śiṣya paramparā* which possibly evolved from the guild and was the dominant institution in the artistic achievements of a later period. The inscriptions are not limited to recording donations by *gahapatis, seṭṭhis* and artisans, but the broad social stratum of the donors was largely that of individuals belonging to these categories.

The inscriptions also provide evidence on the networks of geographical contacts providing yet another dimension to the concept of community. Traders from Dhenukākaṭa made donations at Karle and other caves of the western Deccan (Burgess and Indraji p. 29, No. 4; p. 30, No. 6; p. 31, No. 7; pp. 32ff, No. 11; Lüders 1020, 1121). Traders and artisans from elsewhere in the Deccan and western India made gifts at places in the western coast such as at Kanheri (Lüders 986, 988, 995, 998, 1000, 1001, 1005, 1013, 1014). The incidence of donors from clearly identifiable towns is smaller in number and the majority may have come from *nigamas* or market centres and villages linked to them. The location of the monuments on trade routes would point to market connections such as the *nigama* of Karahakaṭa (Lüders 705).

Inscriptions from Bharhut included donations from persons residing in Vidiśā, Pāṭaliputra, Bhojakaṭa, Bhogavardhana and Nasik (Lüders 712, 719, 723, 797, 799) indicating an extensive geographical reach. A text of the period refers to merchants and artisans from Bactria, China and Alexandria (*Milindapañha* 4.8.88; 5.4; 6.21). Yavana donors are referred to in cave inscriptions such as the one at Nasik which mentions Indrāgnidatta, the son of Dhammadeva *yavana* (*Ep. Ind.* 8, p. 90, No. 17) the northerner from Dattamitri, believed to be the town of Demetrins sometimes identified with Kandahar although the identification is not certain (Fraser 1979). Yavana donors also identify themselves with Gata/s which has been taken as a reference to Trigarta in northern India but would perhaps make greater sense if identified with Coptos near Alexandria in Egypt.[5]

That Yavanas did take to indigenous Indian religions is attested to not only in these inscriptions but also in the well-known Heliodorus column at Besnagar where the Yavana ambassador from Taxila declares his faith in the cult of Vāsudeva (Sircar I, pp. 100ff). In the neighbourhood of this inscription monks are recorded as gifting pillars and railings to a Buddhist monument (Lüders 671–4). Buddhism in any case had by now spread way beyond the Indian heartland. As for Yavana traders who claimed to be Buddhists, a common Buddhist identity with local traders would have been of immense help in trade relations.

The reference to *nigamas* raises the question of whether ceremonial centres led to the growth of market activities or vice versa. In cases where a *stūpa* was built over a locally venerated megalithic site, there Buddhist ritual may have assimilated some of the local cult. There are other settlements such as Veerapuram and Kaserpalle which are not associated with Buddhist monuments. The building of a *stūpa* requires raw materials, financial resources, commissariat arrangements for the builders and co-ordination between architects, builders, masons and so on. That there was an existing lay community which supported the activity is evident from references in the inscriptions to members of the *goṣṭhi* and *nigama* (Bhattiprolu Casket Inscriptions, *Ep. Ind.* II, 327–8, Nos 3, 5, 6). Did this community become established after the site acquired importance? It is more likely that sites acquired sanctity (perhaps inherited in some cases) and as the community in the area grew and prospered, it began to contribute towards the building of a monument at the site. This would have brought both pilgrims and traders to the settlement. The geographical location of the *stūpas* was often on trade routes which may earlier have been used in local circuits of exchange by the people of the megalithic settlements.

The patrons see themselves in various ways: as individual donors, as families making donations, or as a community of donors, whether as groups of *seṭṭhi-gahapatis* or *śrenīs* or even members of a village, as for instance Kalavaira-gāma: as a community of worshippers but differentiating between *bhikkhus* (monks), *bhikkhunis* (nuns) and *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* (lay-followers), which would seem to cut across social identities or at any rate not make sharp distinctions: as a community of monks and nuns who have renounced social ties but whose donations still link them to such ties. This is particularly noticeable in the donations recorded from sites in the Ganges plain which follow a somewhat different pattern. Inscriptions at Sarnath and at Saheth-Maheth of the time of Kaniṣka record gifts made by a monk together with his parents, pupils, companions and teachers, suggesting a co-operative donation (*Ep. Ind.* VIII, pp. 179–81; VIII, pp. 173ff, No. 3; IX, p. 241; IX, pp. 290–1). Probably the monk in question, Bāla, was a particularly important member of the *saṅgha*. A somewhat unusual inscription at Bedsa in the western Deccan records the gift of a pupil in honour of his teacher who is described as a hermit at the site (Burgess and Indraji p. 26, No. 1).

Social distinctions among the donors are not reflected in the location of the inscription on the monument, where the visually more dramatic parts of the *stūpa* could have been reserved for those of high status. Thus, a *torana* or gateway at Bharhut carries an inscription from a family of chiefs—Dhanabhūti Vācchiputa, the grandson of Visadeva Gāgīputa, dating to the Śuṅga dynasty (Hultzsch 1885 and 1892), but other inscriptions on the same *torana* are of lesser persons. Donations for pillars, coping-stones and parts of railings come from *nigamas*, *seṭṭhis*, lay-women, nuns, *gahapatis* and preachers (Hultzsch 1892, pp. 225, 228, No. 16; p. 229, Nos 22, 27, 28, 31; p. 230, Nos 33, 36; p. 232, No. 67; Lüders 705, 712, 718, 719, 723, 725, 728, 763, 804, 812). Similarly at Bedsa the gifts of *seṭṭhis*, *mahārathīnīs* (women of chiefly families) and pupils of monks are juxtaposed (Burgess and Indraji, p. 26, Nos 1, 2; p. 27, No. 3; Lüders 1109, 1110, 1111).

A more direct form of patronage points to other links. Members of the royal family were known to invest money in guilds, the interest from which went towards financing some aspect of the functioning of the Buddhist *sangha*. For example, Usavadāta of the Kṣaharata Kṣatrapa family gave a permanent endowment of three thousand *kahapaṇas* to be invested in two weavers' guilds dwelling in Govardhana. The interest from the larger investment was to be used for purchasing the cloth for the robes of the monks (Nasik Cave Inscription No. 10, *Ep. Ind.* VIII, pp. 78ff). Here a different kind of nexus is established which still draws on patronage but of a less obvious kind. It is also a nexus which brings together royalty, commercial interest and the *saṅgha*. The status of a weaver's guild was clearly high at this time. Elsewhere an official of the Kuṣāṇa government made an endowment to a guild of flour millers, the interest from which was to be used to feed a hundred *brāhmaṇas* per day (*Ep. Ind.* XXI, p. 60). Investments in guilds are also referred to in inscriptions from Nagarjunakonda where *akṣaya-nīvi* or permanent endowments are made sometimes of as much as a hundred denarii (*Ep. Ind.* XX, pp. 16ff). Four guilds were involved in this transaction. Perhaps some of these endowments are actualized in the hoards of Roman coins from this area. Gift systems can co-exist with commerce, the gift economy and the market economy not necessarily being in conflict but juxtaposed. The gift can play a dual role of a donation as well as an investment. The geographical network may not be an arbitrary one and can constitute a network of markets and trade as well.

A striking aspect of these donations is the number of women donors. Donations from queens and women of the royal families are of course known from Buddhist sites. Aśoka Maurya orders the recording of the donations of his queen Kāruvākī (Bloch p. 159). Sātavāhana and Ikṣvāku inscriptions also record such donations. Royal patronage was generally extended to more than a single religious sect since in theory at least it was expected not to be partisan. The political and social dimensions of royal power often made it necessary for there to be a range of patronage and this could be more easily handled along gender lines, although it may not have originated in this form. Thus the Ikṣvāku and Sātavāhana rulers presided over Brahmanical *yajñas* whilst their wives and sisters made donations to Buddhist monuments (*Ep. Ind.* XX, pp. 1ff; Rosen in Dallapiccola). This was one way of balancing sociopolitical factions and pressures. Within this category may also be recorded the donations of the wives of local chiefs in the western Deccan. This is not to preclude the importance of the wishes of individual women making donations to particular religious sects, but rather to suggest that the support given to religious sects may also have been encouraged by other considerations, however conscious or subconscious.

What is more striking however are the donations of ordinary women contributing to the building and adornment of *stūpas* and *caityas* and the cutting of cells and cisterns in the rock monasteries. These come in larger numbers from the *seṭṭhi-gahapati* and artisanal families. This is in conformity with the Pāli canon where women from wealthy *gahapati* families are listed as donors. There is also a close relation between the *saṅgha* and women donors at *stūpa* sites where many such donations come from nuns. This may have been because such donations were small. Generally the contributions are linked to individual names. However in the case of a land donation, the names are often mentioned as part of a family. In family donations women are given equal importance with men. Frequently the donations are made by a husband and wife. This raises the question of whether women in the *gahapati* group shared in rights to their husbands' property. In some cases the donations are from widows together with their sons. The recording of such joint donations may be due to Buddhist women having a better status or else, local inheritance systems being different from those described in the *dharmaśāstras*.

These inscriptions are in sharp contrast to the statements of the Manu *Dharmaśāstra* on the position of women (5.148–56; 9.2–7). Where the donation is by a single woman there it could be argued that it was part of her *strī-dhana*, the wealth given to a woman by her parents, more specifically by her mother, over which the woman theoretically had complete rights of disposal. However it does remain curious that such records are more frequent in Buddhist and Jaina contexts than those of other religious sects. Devotion to the Buddhist teaching on the part of women from royal families and those of merchants and financiers, is not unknown in Mahāyāna texts of this period, some of which are thought to have been compiled in the eastern Deccan. A well-known section of the *Prajñāpāramitā* narrates in detail the story of the daughter of the merchant who assisted the *bodhisattva* Saddāprarudita to realize the *dhamma* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtram*, quoted in Paul pp. 115ff).

As an economic activity patronage can be seen as the redistribution of wealth, in this case from the individual or the family to the *saṅgha*, or from one group of professionals to another as for instance in the donation made by the guild of corn dealers which doubtless went to finance the guild of stone carvers working on the monument. The ivory workers' guild have not told us in their inscription whether they worked on the *stūpa* in their spare time or whether they dedicated their time as wealth. Possibly the idea of time as wealth was not one readily recognized by that society. The overlap of patron and craftsman or artist in this situation enhanced the status of the craftsman. This overlap is an inversion of the pattern of patronage as it is generally defined where the patron is distinct from the artist and of a higher social status. The patron as the donor is materially richer than the recipient, but in this case the recipient is the *saṅgha* whose wealth theoretically is non-existent since the monks and nuns have renounced wealth. Nevertheless the *saṅgha* even as recipient has a higher moral authority than the patron. This may point to a characteristic of at least some other patterns of patronage as well. In the embedded patronage of the lineage-based societies (or what have sometimes been called 'tribal' societies), the bard as the genealogist of the chief had in some respects an authority higher than the chief even though the chief was his patron. The legitimation by descent of the chief so crucial to such societies lay in the hands of the genealogist. This relationship has been characteristic even of later day smaller kingdoms until recent times.[6]

The economic structure of patronage to the *saṅgha* did not remain the same over time. Contributions to the building of *stūpas* changed from a larger number of small donations to a fewer number of large donations. This may have had to do with a greater economic consolidation of traders and prosperous artisans (*Dīgha Nikāya* 1.51; *Majjhima Nikāya* 1.85; *Mahāvastu* 3.113.443; *Milindapañha* 5.4.331). Inscriptions refer to a variety of professions which earlier were regarded as not very lucrative such as timber merchants, cloak makers, blacksmiths, masons and builders. Contributions to the cutting of caves come less often from professional groups and more frequently from rich donors, specifically *seṭṭhis*, apart from royalty and high status officers.

The actual process of collecting contributions in money or in kind was probably through itinerant monks doing the rounds of their parish, demarcated by the boundary of each monastic institution. Alternatively donations could be collected when lay followers and others came on pilgrimage at special calendrical events. The urban organization of guilds and the concept of shares in a guild may have been the prototype for such a collection. This probably also led to monks taking on a supervisory role in the construction of the monument which may gradually have included the more technical aspects of architecture and sculpture; hence the references to the *navakamika*/builder, Damaguta, the pupil of Aya Pasanaka (Lüders 154). Another inscription (Lüders 155) refers to a monk Saṅgharakhita, who was also a pupil or *atevāsin* of Aya Pasanaka. If pupilage here referred merely to Buddhist teaching from a monk, then the word *śisya* is more likely to have been used. The term *atevāsin* is often used for apprenticeship. A large-scale monument would obviously require planning, phasing and over-seeing which may originally have been left to the guild of builders but which eventually went into the making of the profession of *sūtradhāras* so central to the architecture of the post-Gupta period.

Community patronage of this kind began to decline from the mid-first millennium AD with the increase in royal patronage and still later that of wealthy landowners. Some of this had to do with the decline of Buddhism in northern and western India when with the slowing down of trade the usual patronage to Buddhist monasteries also decreased. Decline in trade meant the decline of the guild as an important urban unit. The guild sometimes evolved into a *jāti*, functioning therefore both as a guild and as a caste, but its economic power is likely to have been curtailed or diffused. Where the patronage to the *saṅgha* came from royalty as in the case of some Kuṣāṇa rulers its demise accompanied that of the dynasty. The rise to power of the Gupta dynasty supporting Vaiṣṇava worship diverted royal patronage. Increasing royal patronage to monuments dedicated to Purāṇic deities, which monuments grew from small shrine rooms to complex cosmic representations on a grand scale, further eroded the earlier pattern. The survival of Jainism in India continued the tradition of community patronage in areas where commerce flourished although some of the more spectacular monuments were funded by royalty.

There are however some examples of the continuation of community patronage in the idiom of Purāṇic Hindu religious sects. Among these is that of the guild of silk weavers who migrated from the district of Lāṭa in western India to the town of Daśapura (Mandasor) in Malwa in AD 436 and financed the building of a temple to Sūrya, the sun god (Mandasor inscription, Fleet p. 79). Only some members of the guild continued as silk weavers whereas others took to a variety of professions such as archery and astrology and some became *kathākāras* and so on. Yet they retained their earlier identity as members of a guild and jointly financed the temple.

The migration was doubtless necessitated by the gradual fall in the silk trade between western India and the eastern Mediterranean. Earlier the routes from northern India passing through Taxila, Mathura and Ujjain and terminating at Barbaricum and Barygaza/Bhṛgukaccha were the conduits of Chinese silk being taken to Alexandria and the eastern Roman empire. The Parthians had obstructed the overland route between Palmyra and central Asia. Both Chinese silk routed through India and Indian silk were prized items in the Roman trade with India (Raschke 1978). The Sino-Indian trade reflected an intermeshing of some varieties of Buddhist ritual associated with commercial commodities (Liu 1987). However by the mid-first millennium AD not only had the Huns begun to threaten the availability of Chinese silk in northern India but Roman trade itself had declined and what remained of it had moved further east. This shift would also have affected the production of silk in western India.

There are some noticeable differences in guild patronage to the *stūpa* and to the Sūrya temple. The inscription recording the latter is more than just a statement of fact. In commissioning the poet Vatsabhaṭṭi to compose the inscription commemorating the temple and the guild, the guild was performing a further act of patronage. Vatsabhaṭṭi, as has been pointed out, was a hack poet who plagiarized liberally from the *Meghadūta* and the *Ṛtusaṃhāra* of Kālidāsa and who used, predictably, all the conventions of Sanskrit poetics (Basham 1983). He gives precise dates for both the building of the temple and its renovation thirty-seven years later, mentioning the *tithi*, *pakṣa*, season and era, in this case the Mālava era of *c.* 58 BC. Such precise dating is more often associated with the inscriptions recording grants of land, which, being legal charters of ownership had to be carefully dated. The details of the date may also have been linked to the notion of choosing the most auspicious moment for commencing the building of the temple. It forms an interesting contrast to the votive inscriptions from Buddhist monuments which are generally not dated although Buddhist textual sources more conscious of chronology than those of a Purāṇic provenance, date major events in years from the death of the Buddha. That the same guild members repaired the temple after thirty-seven years points to their continuing identity and to their economic prosperity in spite of their varying professions.

Brahmanism established status through the ritual of sacrifice, the *yajña* (among other things) which was tangible in performance but its tangibility evaporated after the ritual was completed. In Purāṇic Hinduism, which increased in popularity from the Christian era, the temple housing an image came to symbolize the sacred place and worship and these in turn were the manifestation of Purāṇic Hinduism initially at élite levels.

The sculpting of images and the building of temples initiated a new pattern of patronage. Gradually the donation came to include not only the concept of *dāna* or gift offered to the deity through the representative of the deity, but also that of *bhakti* or devotion to the deity which was essentially a relationship between the worshipper and the deity.

The act of patronage, seemingly isolated, in fact links up many facets of society. It can be functional in as much as, in one of the aspects under discussion, it makes possible the construction or the embellishment of a monument such as the *stūpa*. As an object of worship the *stūpa* carries a magico-religious meaning which is extended by some of the forms of embellishment as for example, the *yakṣīs* and the *śāla-bhañjikās*. In the making of the object there is also the aesthetic consideration which draws upon both local perception as well as more universally established aesthetic norms as is so evident in the differing styles of Sanchi and Amaravati. Both social relationships and notions of aesthetics are embodied in the *stūpa* and to that extent it becomes a cultural symbol.

Community patronage raises the question of the definition of the community. There are no tangible boundaries which define a community. Often the bonds are of various kinds—language, religion, observance of social customs, acceptance of political authority—and these would constitute intersecting communities. The definition of community in the context of the discussion in this chapter, identified by religious observances and language, cuts across geographical regions. In the case of the silk weavers guild making donations towards a Sūrya temple, the sense of community was narrower and largely coincided with the identity of a particular guild excluding other silk weavers guilds or any guilds for that matter, as also other worshippers of Sūrya, not to mention such categories of people settled in more distant regions.

Community patronage as discussed here points to a cultural and social innovation for that period. It indicates the emergence of new social groups which, apart from other features, also identify themselves with a particular kind of patronage and with new aesthetic forms. The later association with a temple to Sūrya is a redefinition of the same social category but with enough flexibility to identify with a new idiom. In both cases the act of patronage introduces changes in cultural forms. The object chosen is associated with worship and it is curious that this new social group made no apparent attempt to contribute towards the construction of a secular building or perhaps such attempts have not survived. One expects that there might have been an impressive meeting hall for the guilds. This absence has often been explained as deriving from the essentially religious nature of Indian society. It would be equally valid however to turn the argument inside out as it were and suggest that the nature of early Indian religion in the context as discussed here was closely tied to social identity and perhaps more so than to individual worship. In such a situation a religious movement tends to become a cultural signal with an extensive social dimension.

Notes and References

* Published in B. Stoler Miller (ed.), *The Powers of Art*, Delhi 1992, 1–34.

1. These categories are in part based on those discussed by Raymond Williams in *Culture*, London, 1984.
2. For example, 6.63; 5.27; 5.30; 8.5; 8.6.
3. The basic archaeological and epigraphic data has been gathered from the following sources: J. Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and Their Inscriptions, ASWI*, IV, Varanasi, 1964 (reprint); J. Burgess and Bhagwanlal Indraji, *Inscriptions from the Cave Temples of Western India, ASWI*, X, 1881; A. Cunningham, *The Stupa of Bharhut*, London, 1879; A. Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, Varanasi, 1960 (reprint); H. Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions*, CII, vol. II, Ootacammund, 1963 (reprint); J. Marshall and A. Foucher, *Monuments of Sanchi*, Calcutta, 1940; M.K. Dhavalikar, *Sanchi: A Cultural Study*, Poona, 1965; V. Dehejia, *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*, London, 1972; *Epigraphia Indica*, vols II, V, X, IX–XII; S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavation 1969–70*, Nagpur, 1972; S.B. Deo and M.K. Dhavalikar, *Paunar Excavation (1967)*, Nagpur, 1968; S.B. Deo and R.S. Gupte, *Excavation at Bhokardan*, Nagpur, 1974.
4. These numbers refer to Lüders' List in *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. X.
5. Trigarta, identified in the past with the region of Kangra or of Jallandhar was not an important enough trading centre at this time to attract traders from West Asia although it lay along the Himalayan route. On the analogy of Sandracottos being equated linguistically with Candragupta, Coptos or even Aegyptos could have been rendered as Gutas or Gatas in Prākṛit. Admittedly this is not a definitive reading, but given the references to trade between western India and Egypt via the Red Sea during this period, such an identification of Gatas is at least plausible. For references to Gatas, see Burgess and Indraji, 1976, Junnar inscriptions, Nos 5 and 33, pp. 43, 55; Lüders, 1154, 1182.

6. This continues to be true even in this century as is evidenced by the relationship of the Pardhans to their patrons, the Thakurs, in the upper Narmada. S.R. Hivale, *The Pardhans of the Upper Narmada Valley*, Bombay, 1946.

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15

*The Museum and History**[1]

The museum as we know it today had its genesis in India a couple of centuries ago. Collecting objects specifically of past times and locating them in a designated place as was done in China and in Europe, was not an activity of noticeable interest among Indians in previous times. Nevertheless, although there may not have been museums, there were many occasions when a bronze sculpture of a deity or a miniature painting was thought about, talked about, written about and appreciated. Manuscripts were collected and carefully preserved, not for their antique value but for their contents or as votive objects. Royal decrees on various matters were inscribed either on stone or on copper-plates and were located in a public place or were held by families. Other antiquities, barring of course coins, rarely found a location separate from where they had been initially placed.

Buddhist monks inhabited monasteries that were either free-standing or often rock cut caves in peninsular India and especially the Deccan where the volcanic rock was suitable for cutting. These date to the turn of the Christian era. Their walls were painted with murals depicting the life of the Buddha and events important to the mission of the Buddha.[2] When they fell into disuse, the paintings were damaged. Where living in cave monasteries was discontinued and the caves deserted, there the entrances got blocked by rock fall and this helped preserve the painting. In later periods some sanctums of Hindu temples had murals.

What did survive and underwent changes of style and aesthetics was sculpture. Stone sculpture was profuse as it was frequently an adjunct to the architecture of the place of worship. In a few places where stone was sparse, brick and clay were used. Buddhist sacred places had icons of the Buddha as well as panels depicting narratives of the biography of the

Buddha and scenes of secular life.[3] Hindu sculpture tended to be images of deities and scenes from mythology and a depiction of narratives from the better-known epics. However, free-standing images in stone were also made for placing in the sanctum. Bronze icons were taken out in procession on ritual occasions.[4] Icons also had a political significance, when, at the end of a campaign the victor brought home the icon worshipped by his defeated enemy and claimed acknowledgement from its deity.[5]

These icons were made by professional craftsmen in accordance with the Sanskrit manuals on sculpture and architecture—the *śilpaśāstras*. They described in minute detail how each variant icon of a deity and other figures were to be sculpted. Icons under worship that were thought to be somewhat worn out after a time, were replaced with new ones. It was recommended that the old ones be ritually submerged in rivers. More often however, lesser divinities were placed in the precincts of the temple or under a tree, for continuing worship along with other deities.

Folk deities were of course worshipped in larger numbers, but were frequently of wood or terracotta and placed in small shrines. Their iconography sometimes overlapped with the orthodox stone images but more often was different. Because they were made of biodegradable material, these icons did not survive over long periods and had to be replaced more frequently than those in stone and metal. Recognizing the importance of these images, both ritually and aesthetically, is a recent development and they still tend to be segregated and kept in 'Craft Museums'.

From about the eleventh century AD manuscripts on birch bark and palm leaves began to be illustrated. Many of these were written by Jaina and Buddhist monks, or by scholarly *brāhmaṇas* and kept in the *bhanḍāra*, or repository attached to the place of worship, or else they were kept by the families of royalty, priests, merchants and wealthy householders. The gifting of manuscripts and hence their being written in large numbers was a pious act among some religious sects such as of the Jainas.[6] Illustrated manuscripts were in a distinctive style different from the painting that had preceded them. They did not feature in the discussions on aesthetics among erudite Sanskrit scholars, their use being largely in religious discourse; but they would nevertheless have been discussed in other circles. The adoption of paper for manuscripts, from about the twelfth century tended to change the format and size of the illustrations.

These miniature paintings, illustrating manuscripts on a variety of themes, were the opposite of the earlier murals stylistically and thematically.

As a genre they became an important item of royal patronage in the courts of the Sultans, the Mughals and lesser rulers up until the eighteenth century. In some ways they were the counterpart to the extensive articulation in sculpture of the earlier period. The paintings included illustrations of the Indo-Persian epics such as the *Hamzā-nāmā* and the *Tūti-nāmā*, narratives from the Sanskrit epic especially the *Mahābhārata*, and semi-historical texts such as the *Pādshah-nāmā* depicting events at the imperial court.[7] Miniature painting was a link to earlier Indian and Persian book illustration.

This change in style and medium gave prominence to well-established royal ateliers and the painters who worked there. Judging by their names they came from a range of social castes and artisan families, and from various religions—Hindu, Jaina and Muslim. Representation of activities of kings and nobles and their portraits became a central feature, or else there was a focus on the special interests of a particular emperor. Jahangir being something of a naturalist employed artists who excelled in detailed paintings of flowers and birds.

Miniature paintings when collected and kept as albums and distinct from book illustrations, further encouraged royal and private collections. These collections were in part a parallel to the royal treasuries, going back to early times. They housed a variety of objects—some had been gifted to the king and others were kept in storage to be given as gifts.

From the sixteenth century onwards Europeans belonging to religious missions such as the Jesuits or merchants in trading companies, settled in towns that were political and commercial centres in order to facilitate their proselytizing or their ventures in trade. Those holding office in trading companies started a fashion for albums of paintings depicting everyday scenes of street life in the towns and in the households of the newly rich Europeans, imitating an Indian life style. The Kalighat paintings of Bengal represented one style among these.[8] The style however was different from that of the miniatures. Inevitably, collecting antiquities for commercial use was not far behind. By the eighteenth century, entrepreneurs such as Antoine Polier and Claude Martin, had substantial personal collections.[9] Claude Martin for example, made a fortune in business transactions and knew that there was a demand for oriental antiques in Europe where both royalty and the wealthy bourgeoisie were now interested in exotica. Like others, he too shipped these collections to Europe where they were sold for an impressive profit. The collections took on the character of private museums although they were not referred to as such.

The East India Company treated such collecting as the hobby of gentleman traders. Its officers were not averse to trading privately and accumulating wealth both in the form of money and of objects that had a market in Britain. The increasing availability of such exotica raised the demand for Indian antiquities in the markets of Europe.

However, some officers of the East India Company were, apart from their usual functions, seriously interested in investigating the Indian past. But they could not recognize histories that might have helped them in this investigation, barring only one—*Kalhaṇa's Rājataraṅginī* which being a twelfth century history of Kashmir could not provide evidence for an all-India history. They argued therefore, that India was an ahistorical civilization and lacked a sense of history. It was thought incumbent upon these officers to discover the Indian past. Sir William Jones established the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784 for precisely this purpose.[10]

Later, after 1857, when the East India Company's control over its Indian possessions was taken over by the British Government, India became a directly administered colony. Administration moved from the private officers of a trading company to the representatives of the British government in India—the Viceroy and his Council. This included officers of the Civil Service; who supervised the administration of various state activities, including those related to antiquities. There was a shift from collecting antiquities for sale on the European market to collecting antiquities to reconstruct the early history of India. From being exotic objects, antiquities now became factual data in the knowledge system pertaining to the colony.

The colonial state believed that furthering knowledge about the colony was one of the means of exercising power over the colony. Lord Curzon regarded it as what he called, the necessary furniture of empire. But antiquities when seen as art raised other problems. For instance, the aesthetic of 'the Other', the colonial society, was different and unfamiliar. Pre-Islamic Indian art was viewed as over-decorative and unrealistic with the many armed anthropomorphic deities being described as somewhat monstrous.[11]

Unearthing the past became a major activity among some officers of the British Indian Government. Alexander Cunningham consulted, among other sources, the itinerary of a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Hsüan Tsang, who came to India in the seventh century A.D. This helped Cunningham in discovering a number of early Buddhist sites in northern India rich in antiquities.[12] These discoveries increased knowledge about the past but also required decisions about the custody and control over the sites. And so, an Archaeological Survey was established in 1861, to dig, to discover and to conserve. Engineers and surveyors such as Francis Buchanan and Colin MacKenzie, not only gathered data but started collections of manuscripts and artefacts. Private investigators too were not lagging behind. James Fergusson, who made his wealth in the indigo trade, was interested in the historical remains of the land in which his factories were located. He travelled widely, making sketches and later taking photographs of architectural ruins of Buddhist *stūpas*, Hindu temples and Islamic mosques.[13] This helped in the study of the history of architecture in India with attempts to systematize the data. Hindu and Buddhist monuments elicited greater enquiry since the Islamic monuments were viewed as alien to India, despite their carrying the imprint of pre-Islamic elements. This approach followed from the interpretation of Indian history by James Mill who had projected a dichotomy between what he called Hindu and Muslim civilization in India, an interpretation which by now had become a hegemonic concept. Antiquities from what was called the Hindu period were further divided into the pure Aryan styles and the supposedly more adulterated non-Aryan styles, although the definition of neither was clear. It is curious that none of these people thought of discussing their formulations with the Indian master craftsmen who were still both active and knowledgeable.

The nucleus of a modern museum in India was in the premises of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta where in the early nineteenth century some collections came to be housed and exhibited. This was virtually a private museum since the Asiatic Society was not open to Indians or the public until later. The collection was intended for historical research. Eventually the Indian Museum was established in Calcutta in 1866. This was a major enterprise. It was not limited to antiquities of art-historical interest since it also housed material from ethnological fieldwork and later from archaeological excavations. Even beyond that it was intended to include specimens of flora, fauna, fossils and minerals as well. The Indian Museum was where the representations of all things Indian were to be gathered and then exhibited according to a defined pattern that drew on the colonial perceptions of how the Indian past and its environment was to be understood.

Similar categories of collections were placed in museums in Britain. Other European museums, particularly those located in countries which had colonies in Asia such as France and Holland, and whose antiquities had affinities with those from India, were also anxious to build collections of objects from India especially those from the pre-modern period. In India, the idea of a museum was gradually implanted in other important towns such as Chennai, Mumbai, Patna and the like, where antiquities had been gathered from the region. Some decades later, University Departments of History began to house small collections of local finds used mainly in teaching art history The controversy over whether significant objects should remain in local museums or be transferred to the central museum is a continuing debate. With the recognition of regional cultures in the sub-continent there is support for regional museums.

The artefacts in Indian museums were initially unfamiliar to the official collectors. Nevertheless, they had to be placed in a cultural context comprehensible to those who organized the museum, even if this format was not drawn from the way in which these objects were viewed by the societies that made them. Museums in India did not grow out of the collections of Indian royalty or individual Indians. They grew from the colonial government wishing to discover, interpret and order a past for its own understanding of India and for its Indian subjects. The backdrop was provided by events of great magnitude—empire and conquest, colonialism, industrialization and the Enlightenment. These were baffling events at that time, both for the colonizers and the colonized. The last half century has not seen much essential change in this approach.

Placing antiquities in a museum imbued them with additional monetary value. By the late nineteenth century there was a greedy market for such antiquities outside India and the plundering of archaeological sites began to be noticed. This occasioned the Treasure Trove Act passed in 1889 by which the British Indian government declared its right over all antiquities.[14] The removal of these from the site where they had been found was made illegal. However, this Act did not protect Indian antiquities from the official removal of such antiquities to Britain, as for example, the sculpted stone panels from the *stūpa* at Amarāvati. The Treasure Trove Act is incidentally reminiscent of the treasure trove clauses in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya written in the fourth century BC, and the references in many early inscriptions to the king's right to treasure troves—except that in these texts the treasure was gold and not antiquities.[15]

As in Europe, so too in India, Indians of the middle class began to take an interest in collecting antiques and artefacts that had a curiosity value.

Private collections tended to focus on objects of daily use, as well as textiles, jewellery and weaponry, An example of this was Bhau Daji Lad, a doctor and a public figure in Bombay, whose collection dates back to the latter half of the nineteenth century and is located in the recently renovated house where he lived.[16] Nevertheless, a nexus was formed between collectors and museums. Gradually collecting began to include antiquities of art-historical value and became a status symbol with the new bourgeoisie imitating the old aristocracy.

Museums established by the government were invariably called the *ajaib-ghar*, literally, the House of Curiosities but also translated as the Wonder House. This was in some ways reminiscent of the *wunderkammer*, the room of marvellous objects in European houses, encapsulating curiosity about unfamiliar objects and the wish to collect them and to know more about them. Colonial curiosity in the Indian context referred more to natural history and ethnographic displays but the term included art history museums as well. The past was atomized and each object was treated as something unusual. However, the current names for art museums refer to the obvious—literally, the collections of art, antiquities and artifacts.

Surprisingly there has been little outcry about placing religious icons of deities in a secular space, and thereby in a sense, making them secular objects. One reason for this not becoming an issue was that although the icons came from places of worship, many were no longer actually under worship, although some visitors to museums today make a gesture of worship before such an icon. The deity when placed in a museum evoked the narrative of its mythology rather than its being an object of worship. The mutation of an object of worship into an object admired for its aesthetic appeal gives it a more secular meaning and an additional context. This also hints at the debate elsewhere on the concept of a museum veering between temple and forum.

The displacement from a context of ritual was in part achieved by converting the object into an individual item and giving it a label with a minimal but clear statement on its provenance, its period in history and its style. There were major debates among art historians on the aesthetics of variant styles. For example, Indian Buddhist sculpture from Gandhara in the northwest of the sub-continent which scholars have labelled variously as Greco-Roman, Greco-Bactrian, Greco-Bactrian-Indian, was marginal to the Indian aesthetic. Nevertheless there was a debate as to whether this style was aesthetically superior, to the more recognizably Indian style of Buddhist sculpture in central and south India,[17] or was it merely a hybrid style that happened to be familiar to the modern European eye and therefore more easily appreciated by the European. That the antiquities of Gandhara represent remarkable cultural intersections which needed to be investigated was lost in battling the question of which was the superior aesthetic. The use of dynastic labels for antiquities suggested a homogenous artistic expression. It diverted attention from the obvious difference between the polished stone sculpture of an imperial Mauryan style and the terracotta folk deities of the same period. Such debates reflected the growing discipline of art history and the much wider debate on the interpretation of early Indian history and projected the imprint of both Orientalism and Nationalism. The formulation of a national history had advanced with the clearer perspective of history helping to construct a national identity as a prelude to integrating the subcontinent. But this national identity was subverted by the Partition of the sub-continent into the two nation-states of India and Pakistan.

In 1947, the erstwhile colony became independent. In the following year an important exhibition was held in Delhi. The finest objects of art-historical value were brought together from various Indian museums. It was projected as symbolizing the cultural heritage of the nation and as an essential component of defining national culture.[18] Since there was no national museum at that time, it had to be housed in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the residence of the erstwhile Viceroy which became the residence of the President of India. Some regard this as a symbolic conjoining of the highest state authority with national culture. The exhibition became the nucleus of what was to be established as the National Museum. This Museum differed from the earlier nineteenth century Indian Museum in as much as it was intended to represent the main facets of Indian cultural heritage and to educate the public. More recently it has become a focus of tourist interest apart from the scholarly.

Sculpture in stone and metal was given prominence above other arts. This was understandable since historically sculpture in India has been of an extraordinary quality. There was a profusion of Hindu images, with Buddhist images being fewer but perhaps equally if not more aesthetically impressive, as were some Jaina images. This again tended to emphasize the Hindu idiom being the dominant cultural achievement of the Indian past. The recognition of miniature painting particularly of the Mughal period as first order art would have given appropriate attention to Islamic, Jaina and other articulations. The nationalist discourse had argued that ancient Hindu India had been the golden age of the past stretching from the fourth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. The location of the post-Gupta period in this scheme was a later addition. To some extent therefore the National Museum illustrated the standard histories of India and the concept was replicated in the smaller museums.

Gradually however the function of the National Museum began to be viewed from other perspectives. In the late twentieth century an institute of art history became a part of the Museum. This raised other problems. Was the Museum to continue to project a visual representation of Indian civilization to the public, and thereby educate the public, or should it also convert itself into a centre for collating and conserving data on art history and thus become an institution with an additional specialization? In either case, museums would require to be properly equipped with a library, a photo-tech, and laboratories for conservation and restoration. These in most museums in India are either lacking or are inadequate.

Educating the public through an art-historical museum has its own problems. The context of an object is annulled when it is exhibited in isolation and its meaning in terms of its origins and historical dimensions is curtailed. What remains for the public to view is partial, limited to something of its aesthetic quality. Walter Benjamin has argued that the object exhibited is embedded in a tradition and if one is seeking for the aura of the object it lies in the tradition. Yet some others would argue that the museum liberates the object from its tradition. This may introduce many more facets in its appreciation than if it were still embedded in its tradition. However the basic problem remains that of defining the tradition and definitions can be contentious.

The word culture is now often replaced by heritage and a museum is said to encapsulate a heritage. Again the definition is complicated. Heritage draws from a constellation of historical events. But what we regard as our heritage today need not be the same as what our ancestors believed to be their heritage. The complexity deepens when the discussion is about national heritage because this can shift when the contours of national culture change in accordance with the emergence of new nations. Where once the Indian national heritage was viewed as sub-continental, there are now multiple notions of national heritage pertinent to each nation-state of the subcontinent. This multiplicity increases further when we realize that there are many strands to each national heritage with unequal meanings for the various communities of the nation. Ministries of Culture tend to annul cultural differences in multi-cultural societies by projecting a homogenized packet as a national culture which does not always reflect the sensitivities of multi-culturalism. The western world is only on the threshold of this problem with the pressure of large immigrant communities bringing in their own notions of heritage.

If the museum is to encapsulate a civilization, Indian in this case, there has to be much more discussion on what this term means. In popular usage, civilization is still tied to its nineteenth century meaning, and this also reflects the way in which it was played out in the colonies. The priority of exhibiting icons of deities as symbols of a civilization continues. These relate largely to the world of various orthodoxies and elites and although the objects remain familiar the understanding of their historical context has changed. The context could be made visible by juxtaposing other items from the same period, especially where artifacts are plentiful or have special qualities. Objects of art-historical interest need not always be viewed in splendid isolation. The juxtaposition of art and artefact would introduce on occasion a required corrective to the priority of the one over the other, The ordering of the art historical and archaeological museum should ideally invoke new ways of looking at the past. Rather than seeing a single object as representing an entire age it might be more meaningful to see it as one among multiple facets of a moment in time. Given the technical facilities now available this should not be a problem. It would need ways of approximating the virtual reality of the context of the object, and attempting to go beyond the restricted vision feared by Andre Malraux. Technology today can be used to extend the vision.

Matters that relate to museums in the developing world in particular have their own problems. The antiquities exhibited are generally those from the life-ways of elite groups with little effort to put them into a wider social and cultural context. This in part conditions the perspective of the audience, the visitors to the museums. The living patterns of societies generally draw, and have drawn, on symbiotic social relations and representing this would require a radical rethinking of some concepts. For example, the concept of civilization would need to be more inclusive of what have been set aside as marginal or minority cultures. How does a museum exhibit the artefacts of these cultures not in separate galleries but as part of an integrated heritage? Should we not rethink the priorities implicit in what we highlight and how we order and systematize the representation of objects? In a sense this is a continuing problem since visitors to museums constantly change and make new demands on what is to be exhibited and what can be ignored. When going to a museum becomes a matter of interest to those who have not visited a museum before—as often happens in South Asia—then the accessibility of objects in terms of understanding them often requires a refocusing on the display so as to communicate with new categories of visitors. Sometimes this involves having to display objects different from the usual but of interest to the new visitors.

An issue that comes to the forefront intermittently is that of the repatriation of antiquities taken away from sites and placed in distant museums. This was most obviously done during the colonial period. Arguments flow back and forth. For some there is acrimony over the manner in which objects were displaced even if it is conceded that they might be better maintained in the museums of the developed world? Others maintain that all antiquities are part of the universal cultural heritage and involve all of humankind and not just a single nation. Therefore, they can be placed in any museum anywhere and if need be accessed through, the internet.

There has been insufficient discussion of the inter-disciplinary nature of the concept of what is referred to as the universal museum and some see it as merely a way of not returning antiquities forcibly removed from their place of origin even if now claimed as part of the national heritage of where they came from. A universal museum does not simply mean a juxtaposition of, and a larger collection of superior quality objects from all over the world. The concept would first require a redefinition of the categories used, such as, historical, traditional, indigenous, ethnographic, and so on. There would also have to be an attempt to explain how a range of objects from different cultures have come to be exhibited in one place, how they relate to the cultures they have come from and the other cultures in the midst of which they are now located. This would require some radical redefinitions of the categories currently used.

The tendency to homogenize cultures would also come under question and would have to be reconsidered especially because in many discussions of heritage such homogenizing is not acceptable. Hierarchies in evaluating cultures using the earlier definitions as for example of 'civilized' and 'primitive' have now been discarded in the social sciences and would have little relevance for art-history. The most difficult problem for a universal museum as visualized so far would be that of not giving priority to what goes under the label of western civilization since universal museums so far are situated largely in Europe and North America. The museum was created from political acts and social concerns and assumes the superiority of certain cultures. How should this be corrected?

Further, whereas the world of the ex-colonies is asked to let go of the antiquities taken from them, the world of the ex-colonizers is not willing to share the antiquities from its own past with other parts of the world. This creates an asymmetrical situation. How do other countries, less gifted with objects, acquire antiquities from richer cultures to enable them to become trans-national or universal museums?

If antiquities are truly a universal cultural heritage then major museums all over the world should be made trans-national. How is this to be done? In today's world this means that those museums that wish to increase their range would have to depend on an exchange or a donation of objects. The exchange of antiquities would have to be of the same status as those taken away. It would not apply to antiquities that were bought by the museum although looted or stolen, objects so bought raises other awkward questions. The donation could be from museums that have a surplus of particular antiquities.

For example, could antiquities from the West, not necessarily of the first order, be donated to museums outside the developed world and particularly through museums that have high value objects acquired during colonial rule? The presence of such objects in non-Western museums might encourage the study of cultures that are currently perceived as too distant and too alien. Such studies could also result in framing questions about various cultures from a different perspective. Museums in the developed world have extensive collections from various places and particularly from their ex-colonies. By contrast most museums in developing countries focus on their national culture and do not have collections to support the study of antiquities and artefacts from other parts of the world. This can be overcome to some extent by technical facilities. It would help if the vision of museums could be moved from the specific to the more universal.

This is also a matter of discussion within the larger countries of the developing world. Site museums are important to understanding the nature of a site and of the object. The best antiquities from a site are removed and taken to the national museum where they are exhibited outside of their context. There are also complaints that not everything can be exhibited in the national museum and a fair amount goes into storage. Such reserve collections are not always easily viewable even by those researching on them. Would it not be better then to leave them at the site museum or in important local museums where they would be on exhibition. But would they be secure in a small site museum or even in a local museum? The saga of the Kabul Museum in recent times has made such discussions pertinent.

With the increasing collection of antiquities by private persons there will soon be private museums—as indeed there are some already. Private and state museums can become contenders for the best on the art market. State museums are dependent on state funding and this tends to be small and not consonant with the demands of the art market. There are however, many agencies, such as private collectors and art dealers, and patrons of various kinds, involved with either assisting the museum or competing with it. The prices of antiquities on the art market are determined for the international market and have little relationship to the domestic market in developing countries. This commercialization makes it difficult for museums to purchase outstanding objects and such objects then go to private collectors. In countries such as India, collectors do not have tax benefits to nudge them into eventually donating their collections to museums. Converting an antique into a commodity is as good as destroying it for purposes of historical and cultural research.

The future of the museum points us in the direction of thinking anew about what is being displayed and how. The museum, as also the writing of history is the mediation between the past and us. The past is not something out there, it is a part of us. We therefore need to understand it, and to understand it not in isolation but in context. One can only repeat the often repeated sentiment that a museum should make the invisible, visible.

If the object in the museum or if the monument at a site, is allowed to be stripped of its multiple meanings, and made into a symbol of a new concept, then, as it has been said, it can become an object of political contestation. We cannot assume that museums and monuments are protected by the sheer fact that they are articulations of what is past and gone. It is precisely the past that is now being politicized and therefore contested. Situations of political confrontation, expressed through the idiom of religion for instance, have caused as much damage to antiquities and monuments as have time and neglect. We are likely to experience these traumas more frequently in the future, for we live in a world characterized by the aftermath of all varieties of colonialisms, and by political contestations pretending to be religious assertions or statements of civilization. We who are historians, art-historians and curators might well have to go beyond just trying to understand and present the past and may have to involve ourselves in protecting the testimonies that come from the past.

If culture is universal then its universality has to be protected. Economic globalization seems to be furthering all fundamentalisms—be they Christian, Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist. It seems to me that the delegitimizing of each of these fundamentalisms is ultimately more important than the confrontations between them.

Museums can assist in continually emphasizing the obvious—that cultures are not isolated, monolithic, uniform and unchanging. Cultural articulations emerge from the intersection of ideas and forms. If it can be shown that cultures have continuously been involved in giving and taking, then to insist on the isolated evolution and identity of a single culture is not viable. The museum may evoke collective memory which is not just an aggregate of individual memories nor is it history, but it is an interaction of these. The interaction as a process needs to be reflected. This may change many perspectives, involving systems of classification, the context of the display and an emphasis on the elements of creativity and cultural crosscurrents that may have gone into the making of the object. Such reformulations are current in historical writing.

Definitions of culture start with the question of who defines culture and whose cultures are we exhibiting and thereby evaluating and why. The notion of classicism has changed and historians are now giving more space to cultures earlier believed to be marginal, cultures that might even tell us about the other side of the classical. The nineteenth century was rich in its attempts to define culture, but these definitions need to be re-analyzed, re-contoured. As a historian I would like to see a far greater dialogue between the reading of the object and of the text; an object is fundamentally important since it is the only tangible testimony of past reality. The text helps to explain the reality.

And finally there is the question of chronology. The past has its own genealogy. When we speak to the past in the sources we use—be they antiquities or texts—we are tapping into points of time that have experienced their own pasts before we have even reached out to them. Fernand Braudel spoke of the three dimensions of time relevant to every historical event. Initially there is the *longue durée* that over many centuries moulds the landscape of the event. Then there is its shorter social and economic background. And lastly there is the moment when the event happens. To this some have added the fourth perspective—the moment when the observer becomes aware of the historical event, as for instance, in the form of an object in the museum. I am not suggesting that every object displayed should be set in geological deep time. But if the context of the antiquity or the artefact could evoke the historical process that went into its making, could provide a glimpse at least of what came before and what came after, then such an insight might give a different meaning to our currently contested notions of tradition, identity and culture. The museum could then become the focus of a new discourse.

Notes

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1. Based on a presentation at a conference at the Vatican Museum in December 2006 on 'The Future of the Museum'. I would like to thank Michael Meister, Brian Kennedy and Gene Garthwaite for their useful and helpful comments on this talk and for the time and trouble they took to discuss the contents with me.
2. The foremost examples of these are to be found in the Ajanta caves in the vicinity of Aurangabad in western India. W.M. Spink, *Ajanta: History and Development* (Leiden, 2006).
3. Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India* (New Delhi, 1997).
4. C. Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Bronzes* (New Delhi, 1963); Douglas Barett, *Early Cola Bronzes* (Bombay, 1965).
5. Richard M. Eaton, 'Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States', in Richard M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (Delhi, 2000), pp. 94–132.
6. Shridhar Andhare, 'Jain Monumental Painting'; John Guy, 'Jain Manuscript Painting', in Pratapaditya Pal (ed.), *Jain Art from India* (London, 1994), pp. 77–100.
7. Jeremiah R. Loosty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London, 1982); Stuart Cary Welch, *Imperial Mughal Painting* (New York, 1978).

8. Jyotindra Jain, *Kalighat Painting: Images from a Changing World* (Ahmedabad, 1999).
9. Maya Jassonoff, *Edge of Empire* (London, 2005), pp. 45ff.
10. Soumen N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth Century British Attitudes to India* (Delhi, 1983).
11. Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reaction to Indian Art* (Oxford, 1977).
12. Abu Imam, *Sir Alexander Cunningham and the Beginnings of Indian Archaeology* (Dacca, 1966).
13. James Fergusson, *A History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 2 vols (London, 1879, Delhi, 1972 reprint).
14. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India* (Delhi, 2004), pp. 198–99.
15. Kauṭilya, *Arthaśāstra*, 4.1.51–55. Text edited by R.P. Kangle as *The Kauṭiliya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay, 1972).
16. J.V. Naik, 'Dr. Bhau Daji Lad', in *Gallery of Excellence* (Mumbai, 1996), pp. 29–35.
17. Ernest B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1908), pp. 83–109; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism* (New Delhi, 1981 reprint).
18. Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, pp 175–84.

16

*The Museum Experience**

[Museums today are highly specialized and an entire museum may be dedicated to a single category of objects. This comes partly from the collector's mania as well as the wish to see both the evolution of and the variations in, an object. I would therefore like to clarify that my thoughts on a museum are only about one kind of museum: that which is concerned with art-historical objects associated with the study of history.]

People with wealth and leisure and either greed for, or sensitivity to, *objets d'art* have been known to collect them for the past many centuries. However, placing collections in a museum for public display has a more recent ancestry and was initially a European idea. In Europe it was nurtured as part of a search for a European identity that surfaced with the Renaissance and later the Enlightenment. Identity was crucial to the Europe of that time undergoing radical political and social change. The traditional aristocracy was being edged out by a newly emerging moneyed middle class, and colonialism was confronting Europe with cultures very different from its own. People like Hans Sloane and Joseph Banks, both naturalists of the eighteenth century with large private collections of a variety of objects, were eager to exhibit them. Others began to collect what we would call objects from the past. Such collections were both a show of wealth and an interest in a sense of heritage. They provided the nucleus for what became major museums in Britain. The money of course grew with industrialization and was augmented through colonial ventures. Identity was tied into the definition of culture and class. The Renaissance underlined the European inheritance from Greco-Roman culture, even though the latter was unfamiliar to everyone in Europe except the elite. Therefore when museums emerged they were also seen as agencies in educating non-elites into understanding classical culture.

Private collections of art become a symbol of status as they often do. By the nineteenth century they were becoming the nucleus of public museums, some assisted by state funding. This coincided with the European need to assert its superiority among world cultures, an assertion legitimizing colonial and imperial power. Bringing the finest objects from other cultures to European museums was also a demonstration of the capturing of other cultures. Used in comparative studies, these objects were said to illustrate the hierarchy of cultures. This may explain why objects from the colonies, described by some as 'colonial trash', were nevertheless exhibited.

The function of the museum was to display objects in a classified manner. The earliest museums displayed natural history and cultural artifacts in the same space. So classification began by separating natural objects from those that were made by human effort. Geological samples, plant and animal fossils, and natural specimens were included in the first category. These were easier to organize using the classifications of Charles Darwin and Carl Linnaeus. The objects made by humans—ranging from tiny coins to huge obelisks—were more difficult to classify, since the attempt was to place them within a universal history of human evolution. The problem with non-European objects was that not enough was known about them. Stages of evolution were applied to the history of a society. Primitive beginnings were followed by a period of growth, culminating in a golden age, subsequent to which there was a gradual decline. European culture however remained permanently at the apex.

What were collected in art-historical museums from private collections and some purchase were objects that came to be defined as 'antiquities', from earlier times. These provided a picture of the past. This activity was expanded after the Enlightenment in two ways. One was that the purpose of a museum was to exhibit objects and the other was that it had to keep up with advances in knowledge. This was especially necessary if the museum was to 'educate' the public. Sometimes the museum was attached to a university.

Turning to India, we have to ask if the same intentions governed the establishing of museums. As an institution, the museum was initially a colonial imposition. It furthered colonial views of knowledge about India with a recognizable ideological purpose of giving an identity to the Indian past. The museum did not grow from the individual collector's activities as in Europe. It could have been so as there had been collectors of special artefacts in the precolonial past. Collections such as those of Sarfoji in

Tanjore, or of the Mughal princes, or the *bhanḍāras* of Jaina monasteries, and occasional smaller private ones were known. Old and rare illustrated books in particular were to be found in such collections. But these were initially ignored in colonial times possibly because access to them may have been limited. Had the libraries of the Mughal aristocracy been collated there might not have been a tragic dispersal of the books. However, most museums began as state institutions tied into colonial ideas about the Indian past.

The notion of a museum gradually changed. It ceased to be just a collection of objects—what we today call the *vastu sangrahalaya*. It began to be seen as an institution reflecting new knowledge about the biography of the environment and of cultures. Some were isolated cultures previously unknown. Some when juxtaposed with others began to suggest connections that had not been envisaged earlier. The old *wunder-kammer* or chamber of curiosities gave way to an institution of learning, and additionally and importantly, to aesthetic enjoyment. In India, the idea of the *ajaib-ghar*, the house of curiosities, still hovers over many museums and detracts from both educational and aesthetic enjoyment.

What the British collected in India to begin with came largely from their own explorations and excavations, and some from donations. The need to house these objects began with placing them in the Asiatic Society premises in Calcutta, conjoining them to Indology and to natural history and to something they called 'the industrial arts' which were largely the product of craftsmen. But the objects outgrew the space. It was then thought to house them in the Indian Museum, established in 1814. This was about half a century after the British Museum was founded. The museum as essential to both heritage and history was an idea familiar to Europe but was being introduced to India.

Museums encouraged the parallel study of those objects that were gradually becoming the counterpart to texts. Information from texts is intangible and abstract. Objects are tangible and three- dimensional. Often the juxtaposition of objects either creates or erodes connections. The pattern of their proximity is therefore significant. The larger collections fuelled a study of historical change through objects that came from the same region over a number of centuries. The change could be of material, from clay to stone to metal, or it could be of form. Such collections also enabled a comparative study of the same object from different regions—one of the most striking examples of this being the portrait of the Buddha. Thus the depiction of the Buddha from Gandhara in the northwest, Mathura in the Doab, and Amaravati in south India, representing the same person, sculpted in three different regions, not too far apart in time, are physically quite distinct. Central to this difference are history, physiognomy, and the local aesthetic.

Acquiring a collection could come from curiosity about the culture and aesthetics of its authors. Housing a collection however, required classifying it. This was dependent on theories both of history and aesthetics which as we know change with new knowledge. These drew on the history of the colony as envisaged by colonial scholarship and which had an interface with colonial policy. The question of the broader relationship of European to non-European cultures was obvious. In various parts of the world, colonial interests and intellectual curiosity merged and led to an interest in the ancient histories of other cultures. Deciphering hieroglyphs and the cuneiform script gave access to ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia in West Asia. And parallel to this came James Prinsep's decipherment of the *brāhmī* script that opened up inscriptions as a source of history. This was a new perspective on the beginnings of Indian history that challenged the information from Greek and Sanskrit texts. Complexities in the study of the ancient past began to surface.

Historical classification was either by subject or by chronology. Historical-dynastic labels became the chronological norm. In tracing the evolution of a culture and evaluating it, one of the past cultures was treated as the exemplar. If Europe chose Greek art, the choice for India was Gupta art. But the choice was arrived at after much argument. Some preferred Gandhara art of the Indo-Bactrian Greek period since it incorporated the more familiar Hellenistic aesthetic; whereas others dismissed this as 'hybrid'. Sculpture that came from places more centrally located in British India was described by some as 'Aryan', adding even more confusion to the use of this label with reference to things Indian.

In classifying objects primacy was given to those representing religion and the life of the elite. This was more so in India as according to the colonial reading of the past, religion was seen as the primary factor identifying Indian civilization; and that too it was the religion of the elite. And the elite were of course the stuff of history in those days. This unnecessarily narrowed the area of knowledge. For example, some of the most beautifully crafted scientific instruments of earlier times, aesthetically on par with other objects, such as the superb medieval astrolabes, for gauging the position of the stars, were not thought to be that important and therefore found no place in the museums of India. Astrolabes are not deities and although they tell us more about the universe than do deities, such objects came low in the hierarchy of museum exhibits. Part of the reason was that Indians of past times were not seen as rational and scientific despite their impressive contributions to mathematics, medicine, and astronomy. But these were the very subjects that could have been reflected in museums and should be even today. They symbolize the concept of civilization as it is being defined by historians today: that it is a process that inter-weaves cultures, which means that it is not a static, unique event.

The nineteenth century was obsessed with locating the oldest and finest civilization. There was much written on 'the Greek miracle'. We now consider such questions as not so relevant. The concept of distinctively separate civilizations, each with its demarcated territory, its single major language, and single dominant religion, has now been largely discarded. Today we study civilization as a porous, on-going process, the making of which was dependent on considerable cross-fertilization. Territorial control, the use of language, and the practice of religion constantly change. What is important is to track the change, and to ascertain how much of it has evolved from local factors and what emerges out of interaction with other cultures. No culture is ever an island unto itself. This interlocking needs to be reflected in museums.

An impressive example of precisely this is demonstrated in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The Museum has a collection of Indian, Chinese, Central and West Asian, and eastern Mediterranean objects. So, instead of confining them to separate galleries it linked the areas by using a theme, that of the Silk Route. This was the pan-Asian trade link that went from China through Central Asia, drawing in India and reaching the eastern Mediterranean. Its time span was approximately the entire first millennium AD. The museum display demonstrates the interface between areas and their cultures, highlighting the impact that they had on each other. It gives form to precisely how the current concept of civilization should be defined. This could be done in our museums to great effect for the Indian subcontinent, with routes, contacts, and overlapping cultural regions.

Museum displays remove objects from their original context and create a new context. Whether it is a sculpture taken out of a temple or a *stūpa*, or calligraphy taken from a mosque or a tombstone, or a miniature painting that was once a book illustration, none of these objects has a context when it is displayed. The context obviously does not have to be physically present but should be somehow indicated. When taken in isolation, out of context, the object becomes a commodity, with the predictable consequence of its commercialization. Commodification puts a price on each object and it becomes an investment as is common now among the wealthy.

Antiques as investments may well result in the emergence of private museums distinct from state museums. Museums dependent on state funding will slowly fall back in bidding for special objects in the art market as is already beginning to happen. Frequently it is the international market rather than the domestic market that determines the prices. This makes it even more expensive for our kind of economies. Yet some significant objects should be located in accessible public museums. Perhaps we should consider some of the ways in which other countries cope with this problem.

Moving from the natural world to that made by humans had an underlying message. It demonstrated what was thought of as progress from the natural to the primitive to the civilized. Exhibiting the past in a particular way was a method of showing that it had come to be understood by those who studied it. This was a conviction that grew, amongst other things, from the idea perhaps best expressed by a German historian of the time, Leopold von Ranke, that history could reveal the past as it had actually been. Historicity was to be based on precisely what the sources tell us. Such empiricism has been dismissed as the narcotic of the nineteenth century. Yet archaeology and the museum can discover and exhibit some of the realities of the past. Merely laying out the objects bypasses the responsibility that historians and curators have of selecting and analyzing the information that they present. The selection is inevitably linked, consciously or subconsciously, to the theory explaining the significance of that which is being presented.

Setting up museums in the nineteenth century was additionally intended to state that the colonizing power was trying to comprehend the alien cultures over which it ruled. The attention tended to be paternalistic and not participatory. Until 1910, the Board of Trustees of the Indian Museum, for example, was overwhelmingly British with a small scatter of Indians. The British representation was either that of professionals specializing in the study of the sections represented in the museum, or they were employees of the government. The latter were not particularly innovative and seldom took the initiative to change the format. This is a problem that we continue to face in our state institutions linked to education. Administrators assume that they too are specialists in disciplines. With the pace at which knowledge is advancing today, even specialists find it hard to keep up, leave alone administrators. Changes therefore tend not to be made when most required.

Given its varying functions, the museum no longer needs to be treated as an extension of an office of the Government of India. The Board of Trustees, through which many museums function, could have a reduced number of ex-officio members from government and a larger component of professional people competent to assess what and how objects are to be displayed and explained to the public. This may activate curatorial work and make it more innovative.

The objects displayed in many museums begin with archaeological artifacts and move onto those generally recognized as symbols of high status being associated with deities and royalty. In earlier days there was a section curiously called 'Industrial Arts', although it consisted of objects that were handmade. The term referred literally to human industry and its outcome, rather than to machines. In our times this distinction is perhaps hinted at when a clear demarcation is sought between art and craft. We need to consider whether this distinction is invariably viable.

Was the individual artist all that different from the individual craftsman in past times? Both were anonymous, but for the rare sculptor who was named or painters associated with the Mughal court. What we call classical art came from guilds of craftsmen as is attested to in texts and in inscriptions at Sanchi and other places. By way of contrast one thinks of the names of individual artists that are associated more usually with Greek classical sculpture. When does the individual artist begin to be recognized and what does this mean for the way in which what we today call 'art' is understood?

The separation of art from craft also encouraged a distinction between popular culture and high culture, between the work of the craftsman intended for common people and that made for royalty and the elite: as, for instance, the distinction between the Mauryan *yaksi* sculptures and the Mauryan terracotta figurines, or even those from Chandraketugarh. The craftsman who sculpted the stone figure was in fact just another craftsman, similar to the one who made clay figures. The distinction lay in professional training, often determined by the guild or the caste of the artist, and the material used, as well as in ascertaining who was the patron for these different figures. In the case of the *yaksi*, what she represented and the stonework involved in sculpting her, points to patronage that was a cut above the rest. This doubtless gave her a special status that set her aside from what may have been regarded as the more mundane other. This problem had earlier raised a couple of questions, still substantially unanswered. Does art get separated from craft and if so when and why? In their time were these objects seen as functional or aesthetic or both? If the functional gets separated from the aesthetic in a museum, how is this to be explained to a viewer? Incidentally it would be worth considering the degree to which the craft objects were made by women as indeed some terracotta forms may well have been.

A distinction between the courtly and the folk, or domestic as some prefer to call it, was of course made in medieval times. Courtly culture often referred to as *mārga*, was differentiated from the folk culture or *desi*. Was this also an indirect distinction between the artist and the craftsman? The artists who painted birds and animals for Jahangir did so under their own names. They followed the rules of their training but could innovate if they chose to. The craftsmen of this period generally remained anonymous although they too were technically trained and did innovate.

And how did medieval times visualize earlier periods? How does someone at one point in time look at and represent narratives from earlier times? Miniature paintings often depict epic heroes from narratives of the ancient past in medieval dress and style. Are they being seen as people distant in time or is this an attempt to up-date personalities from the past? We today accept this pictorial updating and do not comment on it. How would we react to Rāma and Rāvaṇa updated to the present and shown dressed in a shirt and trousers? Perhaps it suggests that medieval artists and their patrons saw the past as more integral to their present, whereas we are more alienated from the past seeing it as distinctly different.

Yet style and patronage are complex matters. The Candella kings of Bundelkhand were patrons of some of the finest sculpture in the medieval temples at Khajuraho. Nevertheless, they were also patrons of the small shrine to their ancestral deity Maniya-devi in Mahoba. Maniya-devi was aniconic but was in worship and was later converted to the goddess Śāradā. Was Maniya-devi too private or too obscure to be sculpted into an icon? What was the reason for keeping the original form of the rock, even after its patrons had been associated with temples to Puranic deities? Should aniconic deities not be accommodated or at least portrayed in a museum, if only just to make the point that other forms were also significant to the cultural pattern?

Viewing objects as items of heritage contributing to the identity of the society, introduces yet another dimension to the usefulness of the museum.

This is the point at which history enters its functioning. It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that the hegemonic history of India in colonial times was that of James Mill, *The History of British India*, published 1818–23. It was therefore contemporary with the establishing of the Indian Museum in 1814. Was there a link between the two? Can it be argued that the understanding of the Indian past at that time, rooted as it was in colonial interpretations, was reflected not only in the histories of the time but also in the display of major museums?

Mill periodized the history of India into Hindu, Muslim, and British, a periodization that persists despite its having no historical basis. Museum displays often segregate items by these periods. Within the periods, dynastic labels act as separators even where the continuities are obvious. Chronology can be maintained without giving objects dynastic labels. Where a dynasty has ruled briefly, such as the Śuṅga, can a sculpture be meaningfully and accurately ascribed to this dynastic period, or would it not be better to give it a somewhat broader time bracket? Sometimes the technical form is more helpful in recording and understanding the nature of change. Whereas mural painting is profuse in the first millennium AD, it is miniature painting that is more common in the second millennium AD. What accounts for this change from painting on walls to painting on paper? It was a change of location, material, style and inevitably content, encouraged no doubt by using paper for manuscripts. But there was surely much more that accounted for the introduction of miniature painting.

Chronology itself is multifaceted. The past has its own pattern of time onto which we impose our chronology. Fernand Braudel spoke of the three dimensions of time relevant to every historical event. These are the moment when the event happens, then the longer background of the context of the event, and finally what he calls the long duration—the many centuries that mould the landscape of the event. To this has been added the fourth, namely the point in time when the observer in the present perceives the object from the past. I am not suggesting that the chronology of each object should have these three time measurements but only that the consciousness of these may be reflected in statements on chronology.

With some rare exceptions, the display of objects in our museums tend to follow the periodization based on religion and dynasty rather than considering other categories. Yet historical periodization itself has now changed radically. A search for new classifications could be a useful cross-disciplinary study between historians and curators.

This is also tied into the labels given to objects. These tend to be minimalistic, giving information on dynasty and date, and, if required, on religious identity. This is perfectly legitimate provided sufficient information is also available in other forms. But the latter is generally lacking. It would be interesting to know, for instance, how the museum acquired the exhibit. Where an icon or frieze is taken from the external niche of a façade, this needs to be stated with some explanation of why it was placed on the façade, preferably with some graphic presentation of its original location. Where a painting was part of an illustrated manuscript, we need to be told what the text was about, why was it commissioned and by whom, and what incident is being depicted in the painting, in addition to the name of the artist and the date. Even where there are paintings of familiar stories, there is a need to draw attention to special features. All this means lengthier labels and more work for the curators but without this the purpose of the museum is defeated. It also means that labels have to be constantly updated and corrected, a woeful lacuna in most Indian museums. Should the text of the introductory panels to a gallery limit itself to providing information or should it also provoke questions? For a questioning mind this may give added meaning to the exhibits.

I am not suggesting that every gallery should be a textbook in itself but for the visitor it can provide accessible ways by which the object can be understood, both in isolation and as a collection. Fortunately there are many electronic devices now that can be employed quite easily for this purpose. Not every visitor needs to read the lengthier text but those that wish to know a little more should have access to that knowledge. The answer is not necessarily more guided tours but rather more accessible background information.

Curators, art historians and other scholars may well be familiar with the history and value of the objects on display. For them, the museum as a place that houses, conserves, and exhibits a collection of antiquities and historical artifacts may be sufficient. But the function of the museum today is far larger in its role of educating citizens. These two aspects are inter-related. If the display does not give access to knowledge it ceases to be of value in educating the public. This would influence a visitor's perception and experience of the exhibits. Thus if a museum claims to project a visual representation of Indian civilization to the public it has to be aware of the more recent discussions on what constitutes civilization.

Walter Benjamin has argued that any object thus exhibited is embedded in a tradition and if one is seeking the 'aura' of the object it lies in the tradition. Others would argue that the museum liberates the object from its tradition and introduces other facets in its appreciation. But then these facets have to be pointed out.

The museum is also a location of what is regarded as heritage. There are problems with defining heritage since it is that which is seen as giving a nation its ancestry. It draws from a constellation of past events. Yet what we regard as our heritage today may not be the same as what our intermediate ancestors believed was their heritage. For example, the Mauryan emperor Asoka and his concept of *dhamma*, often quoted as the source of our claim to nonviolence and secularism, was virtually an unknown person for many centuries. His is just one indistinguishable name among dozens of others in the Puranic king lists. Only the Buddhists remembered him and wrote of him at length but they were silenced by medieval times. Yet he was subconsciously remembered perhaps through his pillars becoming part of Gupta history and later that of the Tughlaqs and Mughals. Interestingly, these later dynasties gave his pillars far greater attention than did the preceding Hindu dynasties. He was rediscovered and established only in the nineteenth century with the decipherment of his edicts. But today he is viewed as part of our national heritage, claimed as unbroken and continuous for over two millennia. We have a diverse and multilayered heritage. As is common to the construction of all national heritage the world over, we face the problem of having to select from the past. We select that which we think will be conducive to constructing our heritage and identity. The cultures of the dominant communities invariably get pride of place even if the attempt is to present a homogenized packet as a national culture. This does not necessarily reflect the sensitivities of our multiple cultures. We have perhaps to rethink our definition of heritage and make it more inclusive.

Incidentally, the biggest problem of heritage and national culture will be faced by societies that today have large immigrant communities. By the end of this century, these communities will be demanding their place in the heritage of their current host societies—in Europe and North America. The linear definition of western culture and especially European culture, is likely to face problems. There will probably also be some fallout effect on the concept of national culture in the home countries from where the immigrants set out.

There is a third equally important function of a museum, especially now that museums dedicated to particular objects are being established. The third function is that of perceiving the exhibits and experiencing them as aesthetic objects. This of course has much to do with the aesthetic that one is surrounded by and the way the object is displayed. But the emphasis on either the historical or on the aesthetic can be problematic. An icon need not have been appreciated for its aesthetic quality in its own time but we try and perceive it from what we think was that perspective. This is often affected by our own aesthetic, as with the sculptures of the Buddha. We have to remember that what we today regard as aesthetically sound may also change over time with new perceptions and with historical change. In this, the appeal to the museum is to have what has been called, an 'elastic mind'.

A museum carries a message. In colonial days it was the message of presenting a past and in doing so taking credit for what colonial scholarship had done for the colony. This effort deserves appreciation, although its motivation may be questionable. But two centuries later the contours have changed—both in terms of what the museum stands for and what its functions are. The appeal is no longer to colonial authority but to a public being made aware of its heritage and identity. This has been a major change in the concept of the museum in the last two hundred years. The ingredients of this identity are complex since they are no longer just the narrow definitions of nineteenth-century scholarship. The identity has to reflect a society constituted of many cultures each seeking visibility. It is not only recognition of our culture but also of the many other cultures with which we have been, and those with which we are, interacting. Such a reflection is not an impossible task. But it needs both sensitivity and an understanding of the interface between cultures.

The future of the museum requires us to think again about the museum as an institution. It is not enough that objects are displayed. We have to think about how this is done and why it is done the way it is. Are there other more effective and pertinent ways? The purpose of the museum has changed. This was bound to happen with conceptual changes in how we view the past and how we use the past. As with the writing of history, the museum also represents mediation between the past and us. And the past is not something out there, it is a part of us. We need to understand the past, not in isolation but in context. I can only repeat the sentiment often repeated, that a museum should make the invisible visible, but also make the visible more visible.

Note

* National Museum Lecture, 8 August 2014.

Romila Thapar *in Conversation with* Kunal Chakrabarti*

Kunal Chakrabarti (KC): *Romila, you have written a good deal on aspects of religions in early India. Were these an extension of your engagement with social history? Or were you interested in the history of religions per se, which is formally separable from the social history of religion? I have in mind the subdiscipline inspired by Mircea Eliade.*

Romila Thapar (RT): I don't think that I had any particular model in mind when I set out. My first foray into religion in relation to society was essentially the work that I did on Aśoka and *dhamma*. My intention was not to do a study of religion, but to do a study of how religious ideas, but more than ideas how religious organizations, impinge on society, or sometimes more than impinge, become enveloped in or even determine social organization and become a part of social articulation. So yes, I would say that it is basically an extension of my engagement with social history. One of the things that troubles me is that whereas we have many histories of religion as textual histories—the theoretical ideas, the belief system, the ritual practices, and so on—we don't have a really substantial, good, historian's history of religions in India, that is, what the historical impact of religious ideas and practices was on the everyday lives of people at different levels of society. We don't have that. We seem to focus largely on textual issues. When I have been examining ideas derived from a religion, my intention has been to see how they relate to the social and historical context. There hasn't been enough study in India of how religions organize themselves in relation to the kind of society from which they emerge. For example, we tend to give a continuous history to Hinduism from the Vedic corpus right up to the nineteenth century without explaining the major points of change in belief and ritual. Yet, I see a fundamental change when Vedic Brahmanism, focusing on the sacrificial ritual—the *yajña*—gives way to a different religious form associated with Puranic Hinduism focusing on the ritual of *puja*, and the introduction of the worship of icons placed in permanent structures such as temples. Looking at histories of Hinduism, these kinds of differences and the nuances within these differences are often not sufficiently emphasized. That was one of my problems. The link between religious practice and belief and social groups is particularly strong because so many religious sects are tied to caste. The caste identity is a strong identity. There are religious sects and forms of religious worship where large numbers of people are consciously excluded from mainstream worship. The larger population of Vedic India was excluded from participating in the yajña ritual. The larger population of Puranic India was excluded from worshipping in temples. And this is true not just of Hinduism, but is the same to a degree with Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism. The Dalits in all these religions were discriminated against and many had separate places of worship or were cordoned off and resorted to their own forms of worship. The interconnection, therefore, between religious belief and practice, and social organization and institutions has been close in Indian society and has consequently registered changes.

KC: *That is very true. What kind of sources do you have in mind for that?*

RT: In a sense one is working back from modern times to earlier times. But wherever there are references, for example, to the *caṇḍāla* as in the *Jātaka*s and the *antyaja* in the *dharmaśāstra*s, we need to examine the context of the exclusion, especially if it is in the context of a religious practice. If one looked for that connection, it would be found, although it has not been sufficiently investigated.

KC: *As a practitioner my first thought was, yes, it is of fundamental importance; where shall we find the information? From the medieval period, when some* *temples began to maintain records, you get far better information, particularly on participation of social groups and institutional connections between them. It is always a problem for our period.*

RT: It is a problem. But it is implied. If the merchant's daughter who sights a *caṇḍāla* fears that she has to wash her eyes, as we are told in one *Jātaka*, it is unlikely that they would be worshipping together in a *caitya*-hall or at a *stūpa*. When Manu speaks with contempt of the *antyaja* and the *caṇḍāla*, one knows there is exclusion in sacred places. These are groups not to be brought into regular religious practice.

KC: *You conceived of religion primarily as ideology in as early as* Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas *and also in the subsequent essays such as 'Aśoka and Buddhism as Reflected in the Aśokan Edicts' (chapter 10 of volume II) and 'Ideology, Society and the Upaniṣads' (chapter 2 of this volume). Do you continue to consider religion to be only ideology or something more [or] different? For instance, religion has a personal context and autonomy of its own, which are largely independent of the ideological demands. It is also interesting that you have never discussed the doctrinal aspect of religions, and that in the sections dealing with religion in the books meant for a much larger readership, such as the NCERT [National Council of Educational Research and Training] school textbook and* The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300 *(1990), you have treated religion only as a part of the larger social processes. I may clarify by saying that I brought these two up because I thought that here you bring in what you consider is absolutely essential, isn't it? And here, if it is acutally an outgrowth of social processes and you have said that that is how you approached it, then it is evident. Speaking of the doctrinal aspect, your supervisor wrote a book on Hinduism. It is very revealing in a way. I mean it is all doctrines.*

RT: Yes, but my supervisor, Professor A.L. Basham, wrote *The Wonder That Was India* when the approach of Indology was dominant in the study of ancient India. So if you were writing on ancient India and you were writing a chapter on religion, you would inevitably write only about doctrines because that is the way it was looked at, and very much so at that time. Incidentally I found the approach in his book on the Ājīvikas far more relevant and interesting to my purposes than many classical works on Hinduism, even those that are excellent. I do recognize that there is a difference, and I also make a difference between what I would call the religion of an individual and the religion of a social group.

KC: *And the religion of a state?*

RT: By social group, I would extend it to include the institutions, the organizations of the state and of society. It has been referred to as religious enterprise. That is, as it were, religion in the public domain. The individual is in the private domain, until he or she joins a group with a religious identity. Where it is a personal need, it is an emotional dependence on a power that is beyond reach. Emotional dependence is very important because it is a form of support and it assists or sometimes even controls the life of the individual who is a believer. I didn't study the psychological component because one has to understand a different discipline and, therefore, I tended to leave that aside.

On religion as the articulation of a social group and as a religious enterprise through social institutions, one has to ask, when does it become the identity of a community through both belief and worship? When a gathering grows around an individual and acquires location and public articulation, then it enters the public domain. By social institutions I include ways of recruiting members, seeking patronage, mobilizing support to run the institutions, controlling civil functions such as marriage rules as well as property rights and inheritance through religious codes and agreements with civil authority and the state. These are important mechanisms of giving a direction to the social and economic structures of a pattern of living, what we call culture and society. These can also alter certain facets of the religion from its pristine beginnings, as happened to Buddhism.

What I was interested in as a historian was the link between what is being taught and practised and the social context. This seemed to me to be important and also that sixty years ago when I started my research, it didn't seem to be all that commonly discussed. As a historian I've been much more concerned with the *social* manifestation of religion, with how religious ideas both affect social ways and reflect social ways—the two are intertwined. I would also argue that all religions anywhere have a history of change. The *bhakti* teachers would not have existed in Vedic times, and their teaching and forms of worship differed in various ways from that of the Vedic *brāhmaṇas* even in later times, although there were some overlaps. When a religion attains a sizeable following and patronage, it tends to organize its teaching through institutions. Historians have to explain why these organizations take the form they do and how they relate to society. So I see religion both as a component of ideology and of the society from which it emerges. The two go together, both from the perspective of those who are identifying with the particular belief system and those who are *not* identifying with it—those who are deliberately confronting it. The *āstika* and *nāstika* confrontation, I think, is fundamental to understanding Indian religion. I've not posed it in that way in any of my essays, but I think it is implicit.

KC: *It is implicit; it has always been implicit in the manner in which you taught us the subject.*

RT: Historians of religion and philosophy working on India seldom address the question of the historical context of the ideas they discuss. Historians too seem to hesitate in discussing the context of ideas. Philosophies of history look at the text and its ideas, with only a few scattered references to how ideas relate to particular segments of society.

KC: *Sure. Since religion undeniably has a material basis, how do you explain the fact that the Left historians of early India have been so conspicuously indifferent to its history? Kosambi is a notable exception. But even he is orthodox and judgemental. I would say that he deals with religion almost by default. The reason why I made a distinction here between religion being a matter of social context and having an autonomy of its own is that the few Left historians who have engaged with this question of religion do not want to allow any space to the latter possibility. Also, I found it interesting that your emphasis has always been on social groups rather than on the state, whereas many of those who are looking at larger processes often talk in terms of state rather than social groups, which should be the unit of investigation.*

RT: I think that the social group is the immediate unit. It is what we all relate to, what we identify with, and possibly much more. I think there could be two reasons for this indifference and it can be seen in part as a generational viewpoint as well. One, and I am being a little facetious here, is that probably some took religion being the opium of the masses too seriously and tended to set aside the opium. The more serious and substantial reason refers to those historians who emerged at a time when communalism had come to fruition in the post-Partition period and was evident in the world we lived in. Therefore, there was a hesitation in giving too much emphasis to religion, lest it be read in the same way as by colonial historians: religion is the basic idiom of Indian civilization. The attempt was to replace the religious explanations of events by other explanations—an attempt that is continuing to be made by a variety of other historians of various persuasions as well. In order to get a balance there was a tendency to adjust the importance to the study of religion. The material basis of a religious ideology then becomes the way in which religion is approached without giving too much attention to its nuances. Yes, Kosambi is up to a point an exception, but I don't agree with you when you say that he is totally orthodox and judgemental. And ...

KC: *Not totally. He had such a sensitive mind that he couldn't have been totally orthodox and judgemental. But I find that at times he posits very straight correlations between religious manifestations and their material base. His description of Kṛṣṇa as a 'slippery opportunist and a plagiarist' is judgemental.*

RT: I am not justifying what he says but I think that it was partly tongue-in-cheek and it was partly to needle people into thinking, namely, that you can't take a religious figure and confine yourself to praising him. When a religious figure is playing a role in society there are other social criteria also by which he has to be judged. Therefore, this was an attempt to suggest that there were other ways of assessing his actions. Bimal Matilal, the philosopher, has edited a worthwhile book of essays on this dilemma of the religious figure and his social and ethical role. Kosambi was, in a sense, moving in that direction and suggesting new paths that one could follow or else dismiss. Nevertheless, I would like to say that he was one of the few historians, either of the Left or the Right, who drew attention to the historical context of religion in any depth. Most historians tend to follow a pattern—the biography of a teacher, the icons, the texts, and more and more on the texts. But what was the historical context of these texts and these teachers? What was their social impact and why were institutions founded to propagate their teachings? There is a need to track historical change in the history of every religion, with explanations about why a change occurred and what effect it had on the teaching—all the little nuances of how religious changes have to be tracked by the historian.

There have been historians who have studied individual sects or deities but Kosambi's general understanding of the interaction of religion with social groups was in many ways path-breaking. Not that one stops the analysis at this point but rather one has to treat it as the intial formulation of a new way of thinking about this theme. Bringing in this dimension of religion is also one of the answers to communalism because the emphasis turns to the reality of how religion is mobilized to support politics. I don't regard Kosambi as the model, and I don't necessarily agree with all that he says, but much of what he said did provoke me to think along different lines from the usual.

In the approach to understanding religion in early societies, I found that some of the comparative reading that I did was useful in terms of suggesting the questions I could ask of my data. I did read, for instance, historians who wrote on approaches to religion in early Europe, people such as Jean-Pierre Vernant, who really turns the sacrificial ritual inside out; or Vidal-Naquet, who presents the political side of so much of ancient religion; or someone such as Marcel Mauss on gift exchange, who makes you realize that what is being exchanged is not just a gift. There is a system of exchange that involves social status and economic exchange as well, not to mention ideas. I began reading the anthropology of religion. I remember my excitement when on reading the *Ṛgveda* and trying to understand the relationship of cattle keepers to their religion I came across Bruce Lincoln's book. He uses Evans-Pritchard's analysis of the Nuer as cattle keepers and examines some of the religious and social practices in both the *Avesta* and the *Ṛgveda* and compares it with the anthropological. He may not have all the answers but he does show how interdisciplinary studies help in providing perspectives, and how comparative studies open up possibilities of looking at problems from points of view that are valid but different. That was a big step for me.

KC: *I brought in the example of Kosambi merely because I think that he is the best exemplar of the Leftist historian's engagement with aspects of religion and also partly to provoke you, because you know my take on him. I think that he is inspirational and I wrote that on Kosambi.*

RT: Right. But can you think of any—what we would call a Right-wing historian—who has inspired new ways of work on Indian religion?

KC: *Not really. The Right historians have become such obscurantists that one doesn't feel like engaging with them. Often both are ideologically oriented. A person such as Kosambi is always exploring. But the Right historians usually are out there to substantiate what they already have in mind. Often they are not even rigorous because they are just not trained that way. There are historians of the earlier generations who were simply blinkered. They possibly would have been surprised if they were called Right. They were not even aware that they were Right. But they produced a kind of empirical history which is of use. People like Altekar, for instance, have attempted to be truthful to what they understood as fact despite being heavily ideologically motivated. I should mention here that R.G. Bhandarkar and H.C. Raychaudhuri have done rigorous work on aspects of early Indian religions. But increasingly, we are not finding our answers from those kinds of historians.*

Let us move on to the next issue. The two most significant thought leaders in early India in institutional terms were the brāhmaṇas *and the* śramaṇas. *You have written extensively on both the traditions of thoughts generated by them. But it seems to me—correct me if I'm wrong—that you have a certain preference for the Shramanic, their ideas, and ideals. I will not able to point to an obvious example, and perhaps I'm putting it too plainly. But that is how I feel. Would you like to comment on that?*

RT: Yes. I think you are right. If I was being absolutely honest with myself, I would have to confess that I have a quiet admiration for the Shramanic tradition.

KC: *That comes through from your writings. I mean, that is how I felt.*

RT: I would accept that. I regard pristine Buddhism—the Buddhism attributed to the Buddha—as the most significant contribution of Indian civilization. It emphasizes respect for thought needed to question ideas, and, therefore, to question knowledge, and suggests the way of doing so. To question, to reason with the questioning, and to incorporate causality is, I think, fundamental to thinking. The easy way out is not just to depend on the deity, but to assume responsibility for oneself. Responsibility has to be assumed for the kind of society that one is creating, and ultimately one can understand the process. It does not draw on faith or belief but on understanding. That, for me, was a critical revelation. I'm a product of the 1950s and we had been brought up on the idea that Indian philosophy was idealist philosophy, and that Indian philosophers were ascetics removed from society and only concerned with propounding belief and faith. That some major figure was not doing this and was suggesting an alternative drawing largely on reasoned thinking was obviously highly attractive. I expect it does come through in my writings. What has also intrigued me is that some of Buddha's ideas, such as his approach to knowledge and the centrality of questioning were reminiscent of the Socratic method. But Socrates had to take poison for doubting deity and for his alternative ways of thinking. The Buddha didn't and that tradition continued. I am not a great enthusiast of the theory of the axial age, but some similarities are worth pursuing. I think that we have not given sufficient attention to the Shramanic tradition, because we have been so overawed by the Brahmanical tradition. By this I don't mean only studying the Shramanic tradition in greater depth but also trying to ascertain its role in creating a dialogue that may be implicit in some of the Brahmanical tradition. Scholarship in the nineteenth century, both colonial and nationalist, did not do justice to the importance of the Shramanic tradition.

KC: *This is a query that comes out of what you said. How do you account for this complete lack of interest in Buddhism? There hasn't been a major monograph by an Indian historian on any aspect of the history of Buddhism after the publication of Uma Chakravarti's book [*The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism, *1987]. Only some sporadic works on Buddhist philosophy. How do you account for this decline?*

RT: I think it is partly a reflection of the present when ideas of rationality and logic and causality are downplayed because of the construction of the ancient Indian past as being a past where such questions are believed to be alien. We did not critically question what was handed down to us. But even earlier, as I said, when Orientalism becomes the articulation of Indology in studies of the ancient period, there are no Buddhist monks left to assist colonial scholars. There are only *brāhmaṇas*. Therefore, the focus is on Brahmanical literature. What was fascinating about Kosambi's father's autobiography is his desperate desire to learn Pāli, which takes him from centre to centre of Sanskrit studies, Pune, Banaras, Calcutta—you name it. They all refuse to teach Pāli nor is it part of any curriculum. To me this was strange because surely any centre of Sanskrit studies must also teach languages that are directly related to that linguistic tradition. Pāli is a close relation, at times almost a sibling. But there is no interest. I can only explain it by Buddhism having taken a Vajrayāna form and having been eventually transferred to Tibet, and contacts with Pāli-using cultures of South-East Asia and Sri Lanka having been cut off, there being no established marked presence of Buddhist monks. The Orientalists initially downplayed the importance of Buddhism in India. It remained unimportant until its historical centrality to parts of the Indian past was discovered through texts from Sri Lanka, China, and Tibet and monuments and inscriptions in India. The Aśokan edicts, for example, were identified through references in texts from Sri Lanka. In a sense Aśoka's support of Buddhism in the third century BC was crucial in the nineteenth century for starting the rediscovery of its role in early Indian society. Buddhism had a marginal role in the early concept of Indian civilization. Jainism by contrast had a presence in medieval times and has continued to maintain centres of study and worship that have received a healthy patronage. But not so with Buddhism even after the Dalit conversions to Buddhism. The discovery that from Aśoka to Al-Biruni references to *dharma* refer to two streams—*brāhmaṇa* and *śramaṇa*—made me realize that we need to study religion in early India from a different perspective than that which we have been using so far. That also led me to look more intensively at Shramanic traditions.

The appeal of the pristine teaching was that it encourages society to be responsible towards all humans, which contradicts the way in which Brahmanism and caste work, where discrimination against other human beings is justified. This is a contrary position that has to be explained even if caste was not extensively questioned. How did these contradictions arise and how did they continue for so many centuries? I have noticed that some scholars working on the post-Mauryan period up to the Gupta period are now arguing that possibly some of the Brahmanical writings of these times are in dialogue with, or if not in dialogue with, are contradicting without actually saying so, the views of the Buddhists and the Jainas although this is not directly referred to. Is the *brāhmaṇa–śramaṇa* contradiction being reflected upon? The *Gītā*, for example, moderating violence and nonviolence, permits violence in certain situations. Even your own kin, if they act in evil ways, are liable to be killed. I wonder what would have been the Buddha's message had he been the charioteer. Would it have been that no violence is permitted irrespective of what the circumstances may be? Was violence being debated although that is not actually stated? Such discussions would have had a political context too, that of the *gaṇa-saṅghas* passing away and being replaced by incipient kingdoms ultimately to become powerful states. Was the *Gītā* in small part a response to Buddhist and Jaina thinking? I think the question is worth asking.

KC: *Sure. If Fitzgerald is arguing that the* Mahābhārata *was possibly codified in response to the Kalinga War, then it could easily have been that Buddhism had started to receive state patronage.*

This is one of the two questions I said I have in mind and I will ask you later, but you raised it yourself. In Early India *you say that had the Buddha been the charioteer of Arjuna, possibly the trajectory of Indian history would have been different. It is a counterfactual position. We do not know; we cannot know. But what do you have in mind? Let me explain why I thought about it. There are two aspects to nonviolence in pristine Buddhist teaching. One is non-violence to animals, including human beings. The other one is against war. The Buddha himself was from the* gaṇa-saṅgha *tradition and he was against war, though not without exception. For example, although he was from the* gaṇa-saṅgha *tradition, the maximum patronage that he received was from the monarchies in Magadha and Kosala. This is one. The other is, if you remember, when Ajātaśatru came to him seeking his opinion on how to tame the Vajjian confederacy, the Buddha actually told him the strategic moves. He did not exactly recommend war, but did not disapprove of it either. He was from a royal family and he knew the realpolitik of the situation. So, it is not as if he would say, ban war. Assuming that the Buddha with his intellectual advantage was the charioteer, what do you think would he have told Arjuna about what was about to happen? Arjuna had a genuine question, 'How can I kill my kin?' What would the Buddha say to him?*

RT: I think the Buddha would have said what he says when he is talking about the organization of the *saṅgha*. He would have said that the two families in the dispute have to sit together and discuss it and come to an acceptable decision. He said of the *gaṇa-saṅghas* that disputes should be discussed and a unanimous solution arrived at. In this case he may have asked whether territory was more important than kinship. The insult to Draupadī belongs to another category of decision as to whether one goes to war over such an act. Draupadī is symbolic, at one level, of the bonding of kinsmen, so is she representing the clan system? Such arguments draw attention to the historical contest and the question of whether the clan system was confronting monarchy. The Buddha approves of the *gaṇa-saṅgha* system, but monarchy may also have been attractive as having a single source of law and authority, which is after all what the *saṅgha* was finally leading towards. The authority of religion comes from a single source. The major conflict between Magadha and the Vrijji confederacy did have something to do with more than local politics. If the *gaṇa-saṅgha*s had survived for longer, it may well have made some difference to the then contemporary historical events.

The Kurukṣetra war has another context as well. If these were clans in conflict, the question of killing one's close kin is fundamental to many aspects of their organization. Clan polities are governed by kin groups acting together. The enmity of kinsmen is not only a moral dilemma, it is also a political dilemma. Killing kinsmen strikes at the root of clan governance. Can we then argue that justifying such violence weakend the clan system poltically? Fighting over territorial control is more often associated with kingdoms. At the political level alone, is the *Gītā* encouraging the decline of the clan system? This argument would be unacceptable to those who see it purely as a text debating the ethics of violence, but should it not be seen historically as well, as a text reflecting contemporary concerns of the time when it was composed? I agree that my suggestion is counterfactual; nevertheless, it might be interesting to speculate about it!

Such speculation may also reduce our habit of treating each religion as segregated and distinct. We forget that they are emerging and evolving in similar societies and may well have been in dialogue with each other. Some characteristics of the one may have been consciously borrowed from the other or deliberately rejected or there may have been a process of osmosis.

KC: *There is a clarificatory question: You have said that the kin groups should sit together, discuss and decide, and divide up the kingdom. But isn't it what the* Udyoga parvan *is about? And Kṛṣṇa was precisely trying to do that. But it seems to me that Kṛṣṇa's heart was not in it. He was doing it because he* *was the leading statesman and he thought that it should be done. He had a larger worry in mind. Apart from the personal issue of Draupadī, there was the question of land. I mean, it was a warfare for land and the question was how much of land. The Pāṇḍavas were willing to take only five villages and even that would not be granted. But Kṛṣṇa had a larger political agenda as the head of the Yādava clan. He had done it in the case of Jarāsaṁdha, he had done it in the case of Śiśupāla, and then finally this. So it cannot be said that Kṛṣṇa was a completely disinterested party.*

RT: No.

KC: *Whereas the Buddha surely would have been.*

RT: Since we are speculating, I would speculate further and say that I think one of the interesting aspects that needs to be looked at is the relationship between the Yadus and the Cedis. Kṛṣṇa is representing the dissent group of the Yadus. Śiśupāla is associated with the Cedis. There is hostility between them. So what we are really witnessing is many layers of political antagonism, hostility, competitiveness as well as some negotiation. Therefore, perhaps one has to see it also in terms of setting out, setting apart, separating all these complexities and then observing what emerges.

KC: *That is interesting. I thought that I will keep this for the last, but you brought it up.*

RT: I have one other point here. The question of looking at a religion in its historical context also requires one to look at the changes within a religion itself and the causes of such change. Buddhism, for example, inducts new ideas but there are structural changes in its functions as a set of institutions depending on the historical context. It starts as a religion in which deities seem to be irrelevant and, therefore, some scholars such as Durkheim questioned calling it a religion. This begins to change with the induction of deities as also an increase in patronage from royalty and the wealthy. How much of the change comes from historical change? What is interesting about the Mauryas is not just that they patronize the heterodoxy, but that the Jainas, the Ajīvikas, and the Buddhists do not have ideologies that make them great supporters of a monarchical system. If it is true that the first three Mauryas were supporters of these ideologies, then it is interesting that they use them to project a system which in many ways is different from what the Buddha thought of as the ideal political entity. The *Purāṇas* speak of the Nandas and successor dynasties as *śūdras*. This may be a way of saying that the *kṣatriya* clans were no longer in power. Is it a different social stratum that is coming to power? One has to ask if new groups in power changed the orientation of the *saṅgha* and affected the belief systems. Dissident groups in the *gaṇa-saṅgha*, referred to by Aśoka and the *Mahāvaṃsa*, may have confrontations that included features other than doctrinal, as is hinted at. Finally, the Buddhists invented their own mythology and deities. This trajectory is something that we have to examine in discussing the history of religion, whether it is Buddhism, Jainism, or the evolution from Vedic Brahmanism to Puranic Hinduism. Crucial change in a religion has to be viewed doctrinally but also in terms of its links, if any, to the broader social change. The *Mahāvaṃsa*, when it comes to historical times, relates the *saṅgha* to the ruling elite and the politics of the times. The *Aśokāvadāna* depicts Aśoka as completely enamoured of the religion and the elders of the *saṅgha*. This has a political edge that we may not emphasize but cannot overlook entirely.

KC: *A question that follows from it is one of my central preoccupations. What is Brahmanism? Actually the manner in which I would want to formulate this question is that historians tend to take the term for granted. But I feel that it needs to be rigorously defined. For instance, the* brāhmaṇas *didn't exist in the* Ṛgveda *in the sense in which the term is understood today. Even in the later Vedic period, particularly in the* Upaniṣads, *the* kṣatriyas *seriously and frequently challenged the Brahmanical claim to intellectual superiority, let alone dominance. The convenient label 'brahmanism' smothers all such histories. Also, indiscriminate use is turning the term into an empty signifier. I would appreciate your comments on this issue. Till about the end of the Upanishadic period, the* kṣatriyas *were actually challenging the intellectual worth of the* brāhmaṇas. *There were open debates. In the three–four major debates that are recorded in the* Upaniṣads, *the* kṣatriyas *came out triumphant over the* brāhmaṇas. *Finally, Janaka was defeated by Yajñavalkya, a* brāhmaṇa. *So at what point of time and how did Brahmanism become what it eventually came to be?*

RT: Yes, I would agree with you there that I think we need to do much much more analysis on the changing roles and functions of *brāhmaṇa*s in Indian society and we cannot use Brahmanism as a blanket term as we have been doing. It needs redefinition in terms of the history of the label and to whom it applies. For instance, I am puzzled that in the Vedic corpus there is a strange group of *brāhmaṇa*s called the *dāsīputra* or the *dāsyāḥputra brāhmaṇa*s, as has been pointed out by Kosambi. This is an oxymoron. How can a *dāsīputra* be a *brāhmaṇa*? Initially they are scoffed at but as soon as their supernatural powers are revealed, the other *brāhmaṇa*s induct them and they become important as *brāhmaṇa*s. They are *brāhmaṇa*s whose *dāsī* mothers are often named. They are obviously a rather mixed category in terms of the purity of caste, although important in terms of the doctrine and ritual of Brahmanism. This is a move over time, from the *brāhmaṇa* being one of the orthodox ritual specialists to the *brāhmaṇa* doing other things. One wonders why the *Upaniṣad*s have been included in the Vedic corpus, because as you and others have said, the *brāhmaṇa*s do not come out too well in them. Later there is a fanning out of the professional work done by *brāhmaṇa*s. They are the main recipients of land grants and their descendants can seek more mundane professions. The learned *brāhmaṇa* performs other functions when the kingdoms get established, and then has a dual function. He is a learned *brāhmaṇa* who knows all the *śāstra*s and the codes and he is inducted into becoming the administrator. The ministers are more often *brāhmaṇa*s and most likely so too the upper bureaucracy. Some as ritual specialists, or sometimes as administrators, they receive grants of land and become landowners and are given more specific designations. There are further divisions of function. Occasionally, there may have been a *sūtradhāra* who was a *brāhmaṇa* such as an architectural specialist. A profession is upgraded by inducting a respected stratum. The *brāhmaṇa*'s function was to that extent extended further. The learned *brāhmaṇa* and the ritual specialist are seen as embodying traditional knowledge and claims are made that the *brāhmaṇa*s of certain areas are more specialized in these activities, hence the even higher respect for the Gauḍa and Sārasvata *brāhmaṇa*s to mention a couple. Inscriptions refer to newly established kings who invite *brāhmaṇa*s to migrate to their kingdom and to establish a kind of mainstream culture in their capitals, what is now being called a cosmopolitan culture. *Brāhmaṇa*s migrate to new kingdoms to establish mainstream Sanskritic culture and to 'purify' the land so that *yajñas* can be peformed, to consecrate the king, and to provide the dynasty with an appropriate genealogy and myth of origin. In doing so they would often have to tie up with local ritual specialists, some of whom might have been given the status of *brāhmaṇas*. This is suggested by the local inscriptions and their articulation in Sanskrit, the quality of which may vary. Some learned *brāhmaṇas* may continue to establish mainstream culture, and some also associate with the local ritual specialists and to some extent change the nature of the practices and beliefs that they are upholding. The ritual specialists, in earlier times, have a limited patronage when the clan changes to a kingdom. In Vedic society the specialist who performed rituals did so where the clan would gather, though the patron was frequently a member of the chiefly family. Now, slowly and gradually, those kinds of rituals were being performed only by the elite group in the court, and the other rituals of *pūjā*, of animal sacrifice, of *bhakti*, of Śāktā, and forms of local worship, became a part of the evolving religion with a mixed mythology. This process needs to be examined. The learned *brāhmaṇa* who is performing Vedic rituals is still tied to royalty but this religion is only a fraction of the other features of popular religion. If this structure of Brahmanism has historical support then we have to redefine Brahmanism in a historical mode as well.

KC: Bhakti *and Saktism became part of Brahmanism. But each historical context will have to be looked at specifically. We have to locate the agency, and my engagement with Brahmanism tells me that it has no fixed content. The* Vedas *surely were fixed, but nothing since then. Whatever the* brāhmaṇas *say becomes acceptable as a legitimate part of Brahmanism. And it is so elastic that practically anything can be incorporated into it. The only point is that the* brāhmaṇas *retained the agency of being able to decide what is part of Brahmanism. This wouldn't have happened unless some kind of local secular support, be it of the state or of the local* zamindar, *was extended towards them. And you have laid out the process wonderfully. We learn from inscriptions how the* brāhmaṇas *were migrating into marginal areas from the central Gaṅga Valley. Recently a student of mine has finished her PhD on the Vaiṣṇavization of Manipur. She shows that in the seventeenth century, a king decided to embrace Vaiṣṇavism. And then the first thing, of course, was to import* brāhmaṇas. *It is not that the* brāhmaṇas *weren't already there.*

But they were poor brāhmaṇas *who came on their own looking for subsistence. They married with local women and lost recognition as* brāhmaṇas. *So these were the new* brāhmaṇas *and they entred into the relationship that you mentioned. On the one hand, there were court rituals and the Rāsa festival, etc. On the other hand, there were the* maibas *and the* maibis*—the local priests and priestesses. The coexistence of these two groups initiated a process of difficult adjustment. In this case the state was overtly in favour of the* brāhmaṇas. *But the* brāhmaṇas *in such negotiations somehow have always been able to retain their authority. That is what the historian is looking into, the actual processes. How they retained the right to decide what is Brahmanism and what is part of the* brāhmaṇa *ritual process. I believe that Brahmanism is extremely stretchable. It has a body which is more elastic than that of the amoeba. At the end of your analysis you show how Brahmanism was expanding by continuously changing and adapting.*

RT: Yes, I would agree with that. I think that it is very flexible and uses the flexibility. The important point is that the *brāhmaṇa* recognizes the fact that he can use that flexibility. And in a sense that is also what was at the back of my mind when I described the 'Hindu' religion as a mosaic of sects in the chapter 'Syndicated Hinduism'. Now, if it is not a strongly centralized, determined, definitive religion, some can effectively claim to have special powers and authority and take control of a cluster of different sects. In many inscriptions the grant is being given to a *brāhmaṇa* for having performed a ritual to avert evil, to avert an eclipse, to avert bad luck. My suspicion is that *brāhmaṇa*s went to these new courts and offered to perform a ceremony for averting evil. The ceremony is performed and if no bad luck follows, the claim is that the ceremony was successful, and that they have power over the supernatural through rituals. In the practice of religion to this day, in every hut and home, there is a fear of the supernatural and an eagerness to negate any ill effect through a ritual.

KC: *Sure. The specialists outside of Brahmanism who would claim similar supernatural powers are the Tāntrics. Therefore, there was a continous adjustment between the* brāhmaṇas *and the Tāntrics, the former staking claim on the Tantras excluding certain parts, such as Vāmācāra. Therefore, a certain space had to be allowed to accommodate some aspects of external elements. I think finally what clinched the negotiation was that the texts* *came to be written in Sanskrit. After all, how do we know about Tantra unless we go to a Tāntric practitioner? Our access is through Sanskrit texts written by the* brāhmaṇas. *It is a fascinating history of negotiation.*

Moving on, there are certain themes that recur in your writings on religion. One such theme is renunciation. In fact the theme that has received maximum attention from you is renunciation. I refer to the six essays under the rubric 'The Renouncer in a Social Context' and the essay 'Dissent and Protest in Early Indian Tradition' (chapter 5 in this volume). You primarily view renunciation as a form of dissent and counterculture. However, while there is no denying, and you amply demonstrate this, that renunciation in many instances stood for counterculture, some of the most prominent renouncers of early India, such as Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, to name only two, actually helped to institutionalize Brahmanical religions by founding a series of monastic establishments—a feature that Brahmanism traditionally lacked. Are these two different kinds of renunciations, or is it possible to view these as two facets of the same phenomenon, which are after all reconcilable?

RT: I must confess that I was always drawn to looking further into the institution of renunciation because I think that of all the many religions, the earliest attempt to develop the notion of renunciation was by practitioners of the idea in India. It comes later in other religions. So what is it with renunciation? I make a distinction between the renouncer and the ascetic. The ascetic is a person who opts out and goes away and is lost to society. Therefore, you can spend your time attributing all kinds of powers to the ascetic because there is no way in which that attribution is going to be challenged or questioned. The renouncer on the other hand is, for me, a person who opts out of the existing social system into an adjoining or parallel social system. It is an alternate way of life. But it is still linked to society by simple things, like the renouncer is dependent on society for his food. That is a very close link—the alms that Buddhist and Jaina monks expect from a society. There is a desire to change society, but not in a radical way. Living in a self-contained way separate from society is something that is attempted also in the Brahmanical system in the *āśrama*. This is similar to the Shramanic retreat, the *vihāra*, which is idyllic, which in theory is distant from the town, but not so far that monks cannot go to the town for alms. This changes with what Max Weber has called monastic landlordism, and Leslie Gunawardena has done an excellent study of this for medieval

Sri Lanka. When the powerful *vihāra*s became landowners and landlords then it was possible for them to be more removed from society and live more independently. But this incidentally not many actually do. They became used to a relationship with people in villages and towns where they were respected and which became their community of lay followers and others. That tie is difficult to break because in a sense it is necessary. There is a certain safety, therefore, in being a counterculture with a support for sustenance, but not in propagating radical change. It is a fundamental difference. I call them a counterculture because all that they are suggesting is that there is an alternative way of explaining the world and ordering your life. When it comes to Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, some of Śaṅkara's views have been described as being, at one level, a debate with the Buddhists. This is implied by earlier scholars, some of whom have called him a crypto-Buddhist. He realizes, for instance, the importance of propagating an ideology through institutions. This is not something that had been done on any scale before, except among the *śramaṇa* sects. The *maṭha* is up to a point parallel to the *vihāra*, but only up to a point. Śaṅkara, it is said, travels across kingdoms, establishing *maṭha*s, and these were to become the institutions through which the new ideas were to be propagated.

KC: *Śaṅkara debated with them all the time, engaging them in public debates.*

RT: The use of the debate as a way of propagation is important to the self-perception of Śaṅkarācārya that he was, in a sense, the Brahmanical successor to a particular kind of religious tradition within the Brahmanical categories as different from the Shramanic. The two have to be read carefully. Neither Śaṅkara nor Rāmānuja were ascetics. They were renouncers according to my definition.

KC: *Yes, they were renouncers.*

RT: They are concerned with organizing their teaching. That is why they establish institutions. This is in some ways new to, and different from, the kind of institutions of Brahmanism that existed earlier. It is also not the same as what some call the *bhakti* aspect of Puranic Hinduism, where the insistence is much less on institutions and much more on individual worship, choosing whom to worship and joining a community of worshippers. I think that the questions that need to be asked relate to the organizational structure that they created which stabilized Brahmanism. Why was it necessary to have these institutions? Was it a recognition of the need for a centralized control similar to that of the *saṅgha*, and, therefore, the organization of *maṭhas* was viewed as a parallel system? Was it an attempt to shore up the Brahmanical religion against being overwhelmed by multiple local religions supported by the new kingdoms? Was it an attempt at a particular form of systematizing the religion? Did this distance it from popular religion, a gap filled by Puranic religion?

The other interesting question is that, given the importance of *bhakti* teaching at this time and the popularity of the Śākta traditions, how did the change in Brahmanism relate to different facets of *bhakti* teaching? Are the *brāhmaṇas* of the *maṭhas* addressing the *bhakti* teachers or is there a distance between them? Do learned *brāhmaṇas* relate to the early *bhakti* teachers? Or are the *bhakti* teachers distanced from those dependent on Sanskrit texts and speaking of a different kind of worship? There are of course persons such as Ekanāth, who whilst writing commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* is nevertheless part of the *bhakti* tradition. Who were the larger number of followers of Śaṅkara? Was it just a segment of Indian society that was interested in what he was preaching? Or did it have a bigger impact?

KC: *But, you know, once again, as I was listening to you I was feeling the absence of sources. One doesn't even know in which century Śaṅkara was born. Eighth or ninth century is what is generally accepted. Most importantly, there is an almost total absence of contemporary sources on Śaṅkara. There are the other related questions. The hagiographies begin to appear from the fourteenth century. The historical context and the reason why such texts were written at that point of time are fundamental issues. That is an interesting thing in itself. Attempts should be made to start from there, go back, and try to reconstruct the context in the eighth–ninth centuries. But there is a total impoverishment of sources. It is predominantly myth. In the hagiographies of the fourteenth century, the* brāhmaṇas *are said to rejoice in Sankara's* digvijaya *over the Buddhists. But in the fourteenth century the Buddhists did not exist, they were an idea. And yet there was a need to rejoice in these victories of Śaṅkara. So, that is one kind of history. And then there was an actual history of Śaṅkara and his travels, the creation of the* *sacred geography, the network, systematization, and taking up the challenge of the Buddhists, up to a point agreeing and then disallowing the local religions to come into the now institutionalized form. From where can one recover the material?*

RT: I think two kinds of research are required. One is to read much more analytically the work that is associated with and discusses Śaṅkara. This would be to see whether it gives any hints of the kind of audience he had in mind, in terms of who was he in dialogue with, who was he confronting, and who was he agreeing with. This does require a more nuanced and incisive analysis of his work. Similarly, the Buddhist texts need analysis in terms of whether they reflect the suggested conflict with Brahmanism and when. This again requires locating the historical context of philosophical and religious texts, and if they are composed over a long period then to try and ascertain their varying contexts. This is promlematic but is at the same time necessary, given the paucity of firmly dated sources. Second, the fact that in the early centuries of the second millennium AD diverse Sanskrit commentaries on everything begin to get written raises further questions. Why do they emerge as significant at this time and what were the historical compulsions in trying to explain the texts of the past, and what was the nature of the concerns and explanations? We need to examine not only the commentaries on particular texts but also what one might call the inter-commentarial dialogue between the commentaries.

KC: *Commentators are commenting on the commentaries. Ramanuja wrote commentaries on the same texts that Śaṅkara wrote commentaries on, and of course he did not bypass Śaṅkara. So it is a three-way conversation and the fourth one is the historian, except that the historian is not always firmly grounded in philosophy. For example, Śaṅkara's commentary on the* Brahmasūtra *is very stimulating. But beyond a point I find that I do not have the expertise to engage with it. It requires technical training, something that historians often lack.*

Now the next question. I have listed some of your recurrent themes and one of these is the issue of patronage. You are primarily concerned with the role of patronage in the making of cultural objects, such as Buddhist temples and Hindu temples, or organization of services, such as between the yajamāna *and the* brāhmaṇa. *I refer to 'Cultural Transaction and Early India' and*

'Patronage and the Community' (chapters 13 and 14 of this volume). You will admit that historians often tend to make simplistic causal connections between patronage and the rise and decline of religious faiths without addressing the question of what happened to the existing popular base of a religion. Thus, while patronage is a powerful explanatory tool, it can also function as a red herring. Your comments.

RT: Patronage is the support given to a person or an institution including to a religious sect or institution for various reasons. Wherever the support may be coming from, whether royalty, or from elite groups, or from wealthy groups such as traders and rich landowners, there is a political element as well, specially when it is coming from royalty. It is not a simple gesture and has strong implications of the kind of relationships that prevailed in what was earlier the gift-exchange relationship. The argument is that, if I do something for you, in return for which you do something for me, then we have to assess what is being done by each and what happens to each. Who is the patron and who is the recipient? It is a religious sect. If patronage changes from reign to reign as it does, for example, in the case of the Cālukyas who seem to switch from Śaivism to Jainism and back—and this was common in western and central India—then there is an intense competition among the religious sects. The competition becomes much stronger if you know that the next king may not support you but may support your rival. The competition affects both the patron as well as the recipient. This is what we need to investigate: that is, the decline of patronage or the decline of certain religious sects, or for that matter even the decline of temples that don't receive royal patronage and become dilapidated. The maintenance of buildings required continuous patronge. What then does patronage mean, especially for royalty where, in some circumstances, it takes on a political role? It means personal belief probably, although not necessarily, and it is also a reaching out into a catchment area of popular support or powerful political support. If the religious sect is popular and the king becomes its patron, then its followers automatically become a catchment area of loyalty to the king. So there is that element of....

KC: *As a matter of fact, when that is the paramount consideration, then the patron may even be willing to discount his personal preference. For instance, Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga was a Śaiva. He constructed the Jagannātha*

Temple in Puri from the consideration that Vaishnavism was becoming increasingly popular in Odisha. He was from outside Odisha and he required legitimacy to rule, precisely what you are talking about.

RT: There is an interesting and complicated situation described in the *Vikramāṅka-deva-carita*, where the Cālukyas are in battle against the Colas. The triumphant Colas desecrate a Jaina temple because that particular Cola king, Rājendra Deva, does not patronize Jainism. The inscriptions of Someśvara II, who is the elder brother of Vikramāditya VI—on whom this biography, *Vikramānka-deva-carita*, is written—refer to the attack of the Colas with contempt. Someśvara II restores the Jain temples. Vikramāditya VI usurps the throne, and the argument that is made in the biography is that the elder brother was given to evil ways. Therefore, Śiva himself came to Vikramāditya VI and ordered him to kill his elder brother and usurp the throne, and that is exactly what he does. The patronage then shifts to the Śaiva sects because he is beholden to Śiva for having given him this advice. His son is Someśvara III, who writes a biography of his father and claims that he was the incarnation of Viṣṇu. The politics of this subsequent time are that the Cālukyas are fighting the Hoysalas, who claim that they have the benediction of Viṣṇu and will destroy the Cālukyas. Is that why the Cālukya king had to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu? The complexity here is not just patronage but the way politics is intertwined with belief systems. And the question I ask myself is that, when people read these biographies in those days, maybe fifty years after the death of all these kings, what would they have made of them? Would they really have believed that these deities were appearing to kings and ordering them as to what they should do? Or were these narratives recognized as symbols that had a double meaning? It throws an interesting light on the nature of the political relations between these states and the way in which patronage was used politically. This aspect of politics and religion has much to say about why monuments and institutions rise and decline. The continuance of a religious sect requires the necessary wherewithal in addition to a following to keep it going and this may not be forthcoming. That is partly the answer to your question.

KC: *Carrying on with the recurrent themes, myths feature in your writings almost as regularly as any other aspect of religion. I have in mind 'The Origin*

Myths and the Early Indian Historical Tradition' (chapter 8 of volume III) and 'Millenarianism and Religion in Early India' (chapter 8 of this volume), to cite only two examples. Yet you confined yourself strictly to what I call the historical explanation of these myths. That is, you treated myths primarily as reflections/representations of larger socio-political processes and concerns. It's not merely that you did not make use of the various other methodological approaches that were available to you—structuralism and psychoanalysis for instance. You didn't, by and large, engage with these even polemically while many of your contemporaries dealing with similar kind of materials often did. I had Wendy Doniger in mind. Any particular reason? One reason of course is obvious; Doniger is not a historian. Historians have an intrinsic disciplinary take on myths and you follow that, disregarding the other methodological tools available to you.

RT: I think this goes back to an old argument about the difference between myth and history. This came back to me repeatedly when I was working on *The Past before Us* because one is constantly going back to origin myths and then trying to ascertain why a myth enters a text at a particular time and what are the dimensions it is attempting to convey. My attitude to myth is limited. I do use the origin myths in historical traditions because I think that in the very early beginning of looking at the past, mythology was its form. It is important for the historian not for what it directly states, but it encapsulates the social assumptions of a society. What is it that the mythology is saying? It is either saying something that endorses social activities or it is stating indirectly what a society should not do. Often the ambiguity surfaces in mythology that deals with gods. Sometimes they are behaving in a manner which is regarded as the correct manner for the society and sometimes they are behaving in a manner which is regarded as incorrect. Depending on the context the latter may be highlighting what is acceptable. They can do so because they are deities and do not have to accept the codes of the society that is creating them.

KC: *Often.*

RT: Often. So the gods are allowed to break the rules but society is not. I'm treating mythology very much in terms of a kind of social code which is given an imaginative form, disguising that which it is actually doing, namely, setting out a social code. The reason why I didn't turn to structuralism and psychoanalysis is because it involved learning another discipline. And, unless one really has an in-depth understanding of psychoanalysis, one ends up making facile statements, as many do.

KC: *As you know, I'm very interested in psychoanalysis. Also, structuralism as a method fascinates me. But I believe that these have their places. We can learn from them and feel stimulated by them. But we, as practitioners of history, have our own methodologies. When I was doing an essay on the frictive relationship between Pārvatī and Gaṇeśa, I gave it to Satish Saberwal, the sociologist, to read. Satish said, 'Kunal, for heaven's sake, these are gods and goddesses. You are writing as if these are human beings.' I said, 'Of course, they are.' The actual tensions in a mother–child relationship, which is idolized in Brahmanical society, cannot be articulated in human terms. Therefore, it is projected on a divine relationship that mirrors the realm of the human. I think that the historian should make that point. Psychoanalysis and structuralism were popular methods when you were writing. Did you ever feel in any way tempted to use them or did you know that this was not your area?*

RT: No, I was tempted and more so when I read a few analyses in the European context of Graeco-Roman myths and the treatment of Greek deities. I thought it might be interesting to ask questions of that kind. But then it was with the realization that one has to be trained to think in a particular way, to analyse in a particular way, which I as a historian was not, not at all, that I decided not to venture into that.

KC: *The last in the series of the recurrent themes is the* Rāmāyaṇa: *'Exile and the Kingdom: Some Thoughts on the Rāmāyaṇa' (chapter 10 of this volume), 'The* Rāmāyaṇa: *Theme and Variation' (chapter 4 of volume III), 'The* Rāmāyaṇa *Syndrome', 'A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rāma' (chapter 14 of volume I), and the other essays. Also, reference to the text occurs so often in your other writings. You insist on the importance of recognizing the many* Rāmāyaṇas *in early India and even later. You certainly come down to Tulsī and thus are not overtly privileging the one attributed to Vālmīki. Other scholars such as Ramanujan and Richman have also drawn our attention to the multiple tellings of the* Rāmāyaṇa *and they seem to suggest that all the versions, including the serial shown on the Indian* *television and a theatrical performance in Trinidad, carry equal validity. Similar claims have been made by some social anthropologists while arguing for the existence of multiple Great Traditions in India. For example, Robert Miller argued that there is obviously no one Great Tradition, certainly not the Brahmanical one. Each community creates its Great Tradition. I'm certainly willing to go as far as that. But the claim that all these Great Traditions are at par with each other is overdetermined. Ramanujan and Richman tend to suggest that these multiple tellings have almost equal validity. You have only argued that there is no single authentic version of the* Rāmāyaṇa *and that each textual version is authentic to the particular sect to which it is addressed. But is it not possible to argue that in retrospect, judging by the overall impact, the other* Rāmāyaṇas *cannot compare with the Vālmīki* Rāmāyaṇa*? Or do you think that the question is infructuous because comparisons across centuries are ahistorical and impact factor in such cases is difficult to measure? I have already given you the reasons why you can say no. But if you want to respond to that ...*

RT: Oh yes. I agree with you that it is difficult for a historian to say that there was one text that remained absolutely dominant right through in a tradition where different versions are being written. One has to consider the particular society, or the particular segment of a society, and the particular moment in time when that version was written. But I was implicitly questioning attempts to suggest that the various versions all draw from the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. They don't of course. Are they then versions of a floating *rāma-kathā* that might have inspired local versions? Or was there a vaguely heard story that was a rendering of the *rāma-kathā* or the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* or any other *Rāmāyaṇa*, and that story is picked up and worked upon and becomes a version. It is very unclear as to which was the original source from which these versions came unless the source is stated. There was also the question of whether there were historical periods when the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* became central to a particular social group and if so, why. For example, I think that when Rāma is converted into an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu—the Bhāgavatization, as they say, of the *Rāmāyaṇa*—then the text becomes more important to religious discourse and the concept and function of an epic changes into a religious text. That is a crucial point in the rise of Bhāgavatism. And Bhāgavatism then becomes an important religious sect. Sometimes the importance is deliberately pointed out by the writing of a contradictory version as in the Jaina tradition, where the *Paumacariyam* is contradicting some of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and claiming historicity.

KC: *But it is obvious.*

RT: It is obvious. It chooses a story and says that all the versions of the story have been heard from *mūrkha-kukavi*, foolish poets, and dismisses the lot. That is the point at which the Vālmīki version gains added prominance. A significant change is introduced at the turn of the first millennium AD to the second millennium, when there is a *chāyā* Sītā, and Sītā is not the one that goes through the *agniparīkṣā*, because a shadow Sītā does so. Does this have something to do with the Śāktā Tantric movements becoming strong and in which the mother goddesses and women devotees are important people and, therefore, a devotee such as Sītā cannot be put through a fire ordeal? Another point is when the Rāmānandī sect becomes popular, the narrative drawing from the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* gains large audiences with versions in regional languages. The versions are not identical. I think one of the things that needs to be done is a very careful study of the differences. How do the Kamban, the Tulsī and the Kṛttibāsa differ? The differences are crucial. I think that one cannot say that historically the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* was the most widely accepted by all, everywhere. It has to be seen in terms of peaking and dropping, and there are points when it is active and others when it is quiescent.

Another question relates to which social groups read or heard the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* after 1000 AD? When there was a multiplicity of royal courts, then the text was seen as that which legitimizes kingship. People at the court read it and the *brāhmaṇa*s were invited to recite and explain it. It was associated with the legitimacy of kingship, particularly in the context of the person claiming to be king and claiming to be of the *kṣatriya* caste. The forest tribes as the lesser people who are being incorporated, conquered, whatever it is, would be told the narrative, and it may even have been hinted at that their ancestors were perhaps the *rākṣasa* element in the story. But it is a limited readership and obviously becomes more limited when the regional languages begin to replace the language of the court and administration, and create their own texts. Sanskrit would tend to be confined to the few, with the regional language versions appealing to the many. We know from inscriptions that the Sanskrit that was used in some of the courts was of an uneven quality. Therefore, possibly the regional versions were not identical with the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and although they may not detract from the importance of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, they do suggest that there was a different way in which the phenomenon of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was being looked at.

KC: *When I thought of this question, I had in mind a text like the* Paumacariyam, *where there is a reference to* mūrkha-kukavi. *In other words Vimalasūri had to denounce Vālmīki. So there was a text which was antecedent to his own and he was engaging in a dialogue with it. The* Dasaratha Jātaka *may have a completely independent existence. It is possible that the various regional versions were consciously reworking on the Vālmīki* Rāmāyaṇa, *taking this as a model or picking up elements from the stories in oral circulation. Kumar Suresh Singh's tribal* Rāmāyaṇa *is a good example. Discussing the period between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries in Europe, many historians have argued that not all available texts were actually read. But they were there. And the knowledge of the existence of these texts made the discourse function in a literary universe governed by the 'absent-present' text. So this is a difficult relationship and I was putting it as a provocative question. Look at the 2,000 years and more of the history of the Vālmīki* Rāmāyaṇa. *On the whole, wouldn't the impact be overwhelming? But then, how would an individual reader position himself/herself vis-à-vis these texts? I will give you a personal example. My son was in class III or IV then. The first proper* Rāmāyaṇa *that he read was R.K. Narayan's English edition and he loved it. When he was a little older, possibly in class V or VI, he started reading Rajagopalachari's* Rāmāyaṇa, *which very closely follows the Vālmīki* Rāmāyaṇa. *He came to me excited and baffled and said, 'Baba, it's all wrong. This author doesn't know the* Rāmāyaṇa.*' He read it first and for him Kamban's* Rāmāyaṇa *of Narayan was the paradigmatic* Rāmāyaṇa *and the other versions were incorrect. What you are saying is absolutely correct. But the question of the shadow of a text remains even though it was not widely read. How many people were actually reading the Sanskrit text before 1000* AD*? But, as you said, the tradition was there somewhere. Obviously the story was greatly in circulation before the codification began. Why even decide to codify? One of the major reasons is that you take control of a very powerful story and reify it into Sanskrit which then becomes the referent. Now that* *becomes the 'original' version; all others are variants in relation to it. Thus Brahmanism assumed control and authority.*

Moving on to something else, your interest in the religious impact of the epics, especially the Rāmāyaṇa, *doesn't extend to the* Purāṇas, *which you see primarily as a historical tradition of a specific kind. I find it a little curious that despite the fact that Hinduism draws its body largely from the voluminous* Purāṇas, *you chose to write so little about them. For instance, you remained engaged with the theme of renunciation for nearly two decades. I was chronologically mapping the essays—the first one appeared in 1975 and the last one as late as 1994. I've been reading you closely for the last forty-five years. I am a little surprised to see that the complex emotion of bhakti has left you cold. Do intellectual issues appeal to you more than emotional ones? Many Left historians, beginning with Kosambi, have discussed the* Bhagavad Gītā *while commenting on aspects of Hinduism, but not you. You brought in the* Bhagavad Gītā *today, but you have not written on it, certainly not extensively. Any reason why this profoundly influential text didn't interest you? You already have partly engaged with this question. But the religious aspect of the* Purāṇas, *despite the spectrum that you have covered over the last fifty years, you haven't really taken up for discussion. Why?*

RT: I think there are two reasons for that. One is, as you rightly say, that the intellectual aspect appeals to me much more than the emotional. The emotional as linked to religion should be something intensely personal. This does not preclude it from history, but takes the historical analysis to a different sphere. As a historian I study religion in relation to its public stances and public utterances, and I do try and treat it as objectively as I can. The second reason is that when I read a religious text I automatically see it primarily as a historical text as well, and often the latter overshadows anything else. My interest in the *Purāṇas*, particularly the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which I have read many times, has shifted to looking at it as recording a historical tradition. So the religious interest faded away and my focus was on two sections in particular—the *vaṁśānucarita*, which was in some ways central to my thinking about the early *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition, and the other was its descriptions of cyclic time which again ties into the same theme. My interest in the Purāṇic sources was a limited interest and it was really much more geared to the study of the historical tradition than anything in religious history. The other thing is that the Purāṇic articulation of religion demands a more specialized knowledge of the genre, the sect, the deity to which that particular *Purāṇa* is addressed, the region where that *Purāṇa* was composed, and its audience. I really didn't know enough about the regional history of religion of the later period, the late first millennium and the early second millennium, to be able to do justice to analysing a Purāṇic text in all its religious complexity. My interest was essentially historiographical. When one comes to the turning point of the two millennia, one also has to relate religion to many other elements that enter the religious picture of the Indian subcontinent, such as the bhakti tradition. It is unlikely that the Alvars, for example, read the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. From the early second millennium, the Sufis are also on the scene. One has to ask how the Purāṇic tradition relates to all the other religious movements that attracted a popular following. Going back to what I've been saying earlier, there was always the nagging historical question with reference to any religious text as to what was its audience? Did caste fit into the recognition of its audience? Is it including some, excluding others? Or is its evidence more extensive than clusters of *jātis*?

KC: *Till such time as you come to the* Jātipurāṇas.

RT: Yes, but those are somewhat different. I'm talking about the major *Purāṇas*, those that initiate what we call Purāṇic Hinduism. Caste is not unimportant in defining an audience for these texts. If one looks at the identity of groups that converted to Islam and to Christianity, the majority are jāti or familial conversions. And often the caste names are retained because they are required at the time of marriage and for proving rights to inheritance. In many situations jāti identity is required irrespective of which religion you convert to. As to the *Gītā*, let's say that I did not work on it perhaps as an oversight.

KC: *You allowed yourself this oversight?*

RT: Let me explain what I mean by oversight. I did not specially research this text, because it was not central to what I was working on. I am not a historian of religion per se. I write on those aspects of religion that I think are important to understand the society and culture of the past, but from the perspectives of my research. So I had a greater interest in the *Mahābhārata* as an epic than I had in the *Gītā* as a religious text. But perhaps I was looking at it too literally, and there is inevitably much of interest in it for the historian as has been demonstrated by other historians. The theory that there are situations when premeditated violence is permissible, as in taking a human life, is, for me, unacceptable.

KC: *It even legitimizes violence.*

RT: Yes, even if it legitimizes violence. Similar to the opinion of some others I was also unhappy with the message that one does one's duty irrespective of the fruits thereof, or the results thereof. Doing one's duty requires an awareness of what one's duty is and its consequences and why one is doing it and what the results will be. The basic question remains as to who defines duty and does one accept this authority?

KC: *It practically absolves oneself of one's responsibility in undertaking any act.*

RT: These two messages in particular I found difficult to accept in terms of developing a wish to pursue a historical interest in the text. Nevertheless, had it been significant to my research I would have tried to analyse it historically irrespective of how I personally viewed the text. But to do justice to the *Gītā*, I would have had to place it in a historical context, given my obsession with putting all religious texts into historical contexts. The problem is that, as with the *Mahābhārata* so too with the *Gītā*, its period of composition differs from the occasions when it was added to. A single time period is difficult to define although the span is not so big as that of the epic. Interestingly its importance to the formulation of Hinduism seems to have become more significant in later centuries, when commentaries were written on it from the late first and early second millennia AD. Coincidentally this was also the period of the decline of Buddhism.

The other historically interesting aspect is to observe the role it plays in the process of Indian nationalism. At a particular point in history there is a going back to a text and it being foregrounded in a completely different context. It would be worth doing a historical biography of the *Gītā*, observing how the text was used at different times in history and why. Given its political use in modern times, I wonder what its political use may have been in earlier times. Richard Davis has done a most useful biography of the text, but more is needed on the historical context.

If I had the time now, I would think such an assessment would be worth doing.

KC: *That will be lovely. Some works are being done now. Have you seen Palshikar's book [*Evil and the Philosophy of Retribution: Modern Commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita, 2014*]? That is an interesting one on three important leaders of the Congress and several other thinkers of modern India. But the symbolic value of the* Bhagavad Gītā *cannot be ignored. During the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, the revolutionaries would keep the* Bhagavad Gītā *with them as if that was protective gear. It is the historian's job to explain why the* Bhagavad Gītā, *a text which was written perhaps 2,000 years ago, suddenly assumes great importance and then continues to be in view. What exactly happened?*

RT: A biography of the *Gītā* may also reveal times, places, and social groups when it may not have been a central text. Palshikar's book is most interesting. It points to the kind of context one would have to look for even in earlier times.

KC: *In many essays such as 'Imagined Religious Communities?', 'Syndicated Hinduism', 'The Tyranny of Labels', and in many others as a matter of fact, you have emphasized the need to appreciate the historical processes through which the religious assemblage called Hinduism assumed its identity and how the present continues to shape its past. Increasingly a large number of historians, particularly from the West, are claiming that Hinduism was constructed, invented, imagined. I have in mind the works of David Lorenzen, Brian Pennington, and Geoffrey Oddie. This point of view is gradually coming into its own. At the same time, while attempts to Semiticize Hinduism are growing stronger, serious academic attempts are being made to push the origin of Hinduism beyond its modern identity, into at least the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, or even the fourteenth. I have in mind Andrew Nicholson's work. How do you think a professional historian should respond to these tendencies?*

RT: I would say that a professional historian has obviously to examine the concepts—what do they mean at particular points in time and how and why do they change? Even the label 'Hindu', alien to the indigenous religion, changes it meaning. The identity of those called Hindu or Hindi, in Arabic and Persian sources, initially referred to those that lived across the River Indus. Later the Portuguese used the term 'Gentoo'.

The geographical label used for those living across the River Indus was gradually converted into a religious label by the mid second millennium AD. But some unanswered questions remain. When did those called Hindus call themselves Hindus? Equally important, did they all recognize each other as belonging to the same religion? Or did the sectarian and caste differences interfere with providing a uniform identity? Brahminism goes back many centuries but this was not the universal religion of the subcontinent even prior to the coming of Islam. Sectarian conflicts are recorded, sometimes between the Śaivas and the Jainas, and sometimes between the Śaivas and the Vaiṣṇavas, and between other sects.

KC: *And the social division between the Śāktas and the Vaiṣṇavas? They would not even visit each other's shrines.*

RT: There is that differentiation. Let us not forget that the Dalit, even if he worshipped a Hindu deity, could not enter the temple of the caste Hindus. This was not a religion shared by all. The Muslims and the Sikhs also discriminated against the Dalits and worship was often segregated. Religion at non-elite levels needs investigation. As I have mentioned earlier, Eknāth in the sixteenth century composed a 'Hindu–Turk *saṁvād*'. The *turk* or the *Turuṣka* is well known, but who is he referring to as a Hindu? Is he including *brāhmaṇas* and non- *brāhmaṇas* as one category belonging to the same religion? Would the Sārasvata *brāhmaṇas* of the time have accepted being of the same religion as Kabīr or Mīrā or the *chamar bhakti* teacher, Ravidas? The *bhaktas* probably would have. I think this may be the litmus test of whether all Hindus regarded themselves as belonging to the same religion. When the Islamic texts mention a dialogue with the Hindu, they generally refer to specific sects or these can be identified by their ideas. The historical change comes when the sectarian identity gives way in theory to a uniform identity. Was it in the colonial period? I suspect that in the precolonial period the sectarian identity still remains extremely strong.

KC: *Even in the colonial period, as a matter of fact.*

RT: Some sects may not have separated the *brāhmaṇa* from the non-*brāhmaṇa*, but the separating is by no means annulled. What distinguishes Hindutva from pre-twentieth-century Hinduism, earlier Hinduism, are the new features it introduces into belief and practice. What has been referred to as the Semiticization of Hinduism, with features such as a historical figure as founder, treating one single book as sacred, conversion, congregational worship, and its use in facilitating political mobilization, is of course a change from how the religion was viewed in the past. The ideology of Hindutva is fundamentally geared to a political agenda to establishing a Hindu Rashtra and less to religion. This is partly because from the nineteenth century onwards the mix of religion and politics—whether it is the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, and so on—is close. It is not a religious ideology but more suited to being an ideology for utilizing religion for political purposes. This doubtless happened in the past as well, but perhaps not so directly and on such a large scale. The idea of the uniformity of believers in a particular religion being brought to express a political ambition is, of course, something different.

KC: *One clarificatory question. You have been saying that the diverse elements of Hinduism came together, began to assume a common rubric, and began to justify a name, only from the colonial period. These historians, Pennington for example, say that it is a colonial construction, in the sense that it was largely the handiwork of the administrator ethnographers. That is one kind. Geoffrey Oddie on the other hand emphasized the role of the Christian missionaries in shaping present-day Hinduism. These positions do not take into account the larger processes which have been at work for centuries. For example, the early medieval and medieval texts, which talk about sectarian differences but also show sensitivity to the fact that it was necessary to get over the differences and try and stay together. For example, the Goddess is made to proclaim in a* Purāṇa *that those who are her devotees must not in any way insult or disregard Śiva or Viṣṇu because they are her two arms. She said that if her devotees insulted either Śiva or Viṣṇu, she would not be able to extend her protection towards them. So this is an internal Brahmanical perception of the need to paper over the very visible cracks that existed in society. The necessity still exists; otherwise Hindutva wouldn't have so vocally claimed the unity of Hinduism. They are trying to do this by going entirely against the grain of 'Hindu history'. But there was this perception from time to time that it was necessary to bring the diverse elements under one common umbrella. And this is a parallel process to the diversification, regionalization, and* *localization—precisely the process that you mapped out in response to my question on Brahmanism. There was the simultaneous feeling that it was becoming unrecognizable and the agency was getting lost. Therefore, attempts should be made to get them together. Andrew Nicholson looked at the relationship among Sāṁkhya, Yoga, and Mīmāṁsā and their relationship with Viṣṇu and Śiva and the Devī from the fourteenth century onwards. These philosophies attempted to engulf the Purāṇic deities in order to create a conscious unity of doctrines. So while these trends existed, the belief systems also remained variegated. In the nineteenth century the colonial and missionary interventions, among others, helped to bring all these strains together.*

RT: One still has to ask the question as to who are the groups that are being brought together. They tend to be upper-caste groups. It is similar in the nineteenth century when the social reform movements were limited to a relatively small section of society. The census data from 1872, which Richard Eaton published for the Bijapur census, suggests that the upper castes of all religions observe and differentiate their religion in a seemingly more uniform manner. The larger component of society, the people at lower levels, are diversified. There is a differentiation in belief and worship between the larger numbers of people from the lower level that remains distinct from the smaller numbers at the upper level. This happens in many other societies too but often although there is a social difference, the religion is broadly uniform. Whereas with our society even religion is differentiated. It is not identical. The main deities often differ and are not necessarily worshipped in the same way. Deities are prioritized differently.

KC: *This is true of the* brāhmaṇas, *the custodians of the religion, but not of the impoverished sections of the society. I find McKim Marriott's article on Kishangarhi very revealing. He studied nineteen calendrical festivals of the Kishangarhi village, fifteen of which had Sanskritic names. One would have thought that the religious practices were also overtly Sankritized. But Marriott discovered that under the Brahmanical names, the content of the festivals had little to do with Brahmanism. One really needs to go to that level to see the differences between the normative and the actual.*

RT: That's my point. That the two levels are not intrinsically identical. Perhaps there has been a tendency to discuss the veil and how beautifully it is veiled. It looks impressive and there is a faint shadow showing through. But you don't go behind the veil to see what is there. If you do that, the story might be different.

KC: *Unfortunately, and this is something I feel very strongly, the Sanskritic texts can give us only glimpses of the world beyond the veil. One has to go down to the vernaculars and then the hidden aspects are to an extent revealed.*

RT: And a certain amount of fieldwork too. To this day one can still do fieldwork.

KC: *One important question still remains. You have always maintained that the historian must be sensitive to the multiple narratives that constitute a historic event or a cultural object and the many voices in which they speak. Your essays on the* Rāmayāṇas *and your monographs on Śakuntalā and Somanātha are some of the finest examples of histories that are carefully recovered from sources that belong to different cultural locations and the conflicting accounts they present. This approach explains why a distinctive perspective was adopted by each narrative and that each reveals in its own way a facet of the event. However, at the end of the exercise, there is no one truth that can be recovered. This is a grim reminder for the historian who often feels tempted to make definitive statements about the past. The question is, can a historian ever make truth claims or does he/she only add one more, though perhaps a very carefully crafted one, to the existing number of narratives? This becomes particularly relevant in cases of such contested histories as that of Somanātha.*

RT: My answer to that should have come from the book on Somanātha, which is that the historian today is not making truth claims. This was a nineteenth-century obsession and faded in the twentieth century. This is something that popular opinion keeps throwing back at us historians asking, 'Where is that one truth that the historian should find?' I would say that this is not the end-purpose of history. We are not claiming that we are reconstructing the truth. We cannot. What we are doing is taking an event, explaining what the historical problems are around that event, and trying to understand them. In this process we are looking at different points of view of different people who are saying various things about that event, or about whatever is associated with that event, and, therefore, we should look at the complexity of the event and try and understand it and explain that.

KC: *However, Somanātha is such a difficult terrain. I will give you another example from your own writings. The Aryan debate, for example, is another extremely contested terrain. There, however, you are making claims of verifiable empirical facts. One need not have been so assertive perhaps, had the issue not been so politically alive. You probably felt that it was necessary to take these positions. In the case of the Aryans, there are certain things one can take positions on. The Somanātha issue doesn't even allow us that. My question was not exactly about the nineteenth-century truth claims, but the question of empirical facticity of events.*

RT: I think that is something that one can reach towards but never arrive at definitively, in terms of a final irrefutable explanation. The direction comes from the kind of evidence one gathers, the way one analyses it, and the way one puts it together. In the case of Somanātha, the point that was being contested was that the attack of Mahmud led to a Hindu trauma, and I was trying to show that in fact it led to all kinds of very interesting relationships between the people called Hindus and the people called Muslims and others called Turks and other people, but that didn't lead to the trauma until the trauma was mentioned in the House of Commons in 1843. It was picked up from the speech of one of the members of Parliament in Britain by colonial authors and then by Indian nationalists, and it simmered, igniting small fires of communal conflict until it was made to well up in the Babri Masjid–Ramjanmabhoomi movement. I was not claiming to discover the truth in that study. What I argued was that an event has to be understood in a much larger historical context, and that context makes us stop and think about the generalizations that we have been making so far and helps us question existing views.

KC: *Romila, my last question. Do you believe in God?*

RT: No. I did when I was young, but no longer. I have now lived through a lifetime and observed the immense injustice of every kind that prevails in human society. I cannot believe that there is a benign Deity—as God is supposed to be—who is aware of all this but does not prevent it. Given the increasing knowledge that we now have of the universe and of human society, and of how it all functions, it is difficult for me to accommodate in this a supernatural power that is, as it were, in control of it, yet is unknowable. Admittedly though, not every question one has about life and living is easily answered by any stream of knowledge. That answers can be obtained through postulating the existence of God leaves me unconvinced.

KC: *You have obviously thought about it and you seem to be convinced. Now, a question that may follow from this is, do you think that personal belief, either in a positive or a negative way, is a factor that influences a historian of religions? Does it harm or impede one's understanding and articulation of history? Does it help in understanding and empathizing? Or do you think that this is a private matter and must not be allowed to come into consideration?*

RT: I think one's religious belief is basically a private matter. In relation to writing history, it depends on the kind of history one is writing. I keep emphasizing the distinction between the history of a religion per se, and the history of the impact of a religion on social institutions and on historical explanations. If you are the kind of believer who maintains that God or a Deity knows and controls everything, then there is little scope of exploring the explanations of events and actions. If everyone's life is in the hands of God and actions are God-driven or that there are interventions by God, then the logical outcome is what we are most familiar with from medieval European history, that human activity is the Will of God, as would be history in the broadest sense. Therefore, searching for explanations may be a waste of time. I think that this is an extreme position that historians do not take in our times. The opposite and other extreme position is that religion is psychological fantasy and need not be taken seriously in the search for explanations.

However, there is also the perhaps more commonly held position that although a historian may believe that a Deity controls human actions to some degree, nevertheless, such actions are also influenced by other man-made factors that have varying relationships with religious beliefs or with the Deity. The religion of the historian may give differentiated weightage to these factors, which weightage, in all explanations, the historian has to defend. The analysis of the weightage defines the degree to which the religious belief of the historian intervenes or not. This would involve an assessment of the historical explanation. But it is perfectly possible to say, as we were discussing earlier, that if a historian has a belief in a supernatural power he or she might have a sympathetic attitude to religious concerns in assessing both historical conditions and their explanations. The danger lies in either singling out or exaggerating the role of religion as an explanatory factor, even of events that may have other more plausible explanations.

I myself may not have these beliefs in the supernatural but I do not dismiss them as insignificant when I am analysing texts that I use as sources, in which such beliefs are either central or are implicit. They have to be analysed, although not from the perspective of one who believes in God, but from the perspective of a historian searching for explanations, drawing on reasoning and logic.

Note

* I am grateful to Kanad Sinha for his help in transcribing the interview.

Index

Abhijnāna-śākuntalam (Kālidāsa), 251
Ācārāṅgasūtra, 124
Achaemenid Persians, 270
adhyāpakas, 316
Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa, 226, 274
Ādi Purāṇa, 186
Agni, 195, 275
agnicayana, 24
agniṣṭoma, 24
agrahāras (grants of land to *brāhmaṇas*), 68, 248, 252, 253, 299, 300
ahimsā, concept of, 17, 27, 57, 58, 117, 278
Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 106
ajaib-ghar, 350, 362
Ajātaśatru, 5, 31, 39, 124, 382
Ājīvikas, 53, 55, 89, 119, 197, 374
ākāśamārgi, 297
akhyānas, 184
Al-Biruni, 265–6, 268, 381
Alexander of Macedon, 145
al-Hind, 270
Amaravati, 310–11, 328, 330–1, 340, 363
Anāgatavaṃsa, 172
anārya nivāsa, 189
anekāntavāda, 191
animal sacrifice, 57, 244, 265; snake sacrifice, 66; of wild animals, 244; *See also* killing of animal
antevāsikas, 49
antiquities: aesthetic quality of, 352; collection of, 348, 351; commercialization of, 356, 365; commodification of, 365; damage caused due to neglect of, 356–7; definition of, 361; of Gandhara, 351; as investments, 365; prices of, 356; use of dynastic labels for, 351
apabrahṃśa, 193
apsarās, 257, 292, 294
araṇya, 242
Āraṇyakas, 30–1, 52, 105, 143
Arthaśāstra (Kauṭilya), 68, 70, 76, 222, 329, 349
Arya Samaj, 264, 270, 272, 274, 405; *śuddhi* movement of, 276
āryāvarta (land of the *āryas*), 15, 31, 62n1
ascetics: Brahmanical ideal of, 116; control over body functions, 128; meaning of, 103; sexual prowess of, 128
Asiatic Society, in Calcutta, 347, 348

Aśoka, Emperor, 39, 50, 160; *devānaṃpiya*, 198, 254; Kalinga War, 382; patronage to Buddhism, 198–9, 381; policy towards forest people, 254

Aśokan inscriptions, 69, 105, 191, 381; Amaravati inscriptions, 331; Major Rock Edict XIII, 254; Pillar Edict V, 254; Sātavāhana inscriptions, 331; Schism Edict, 91

āśramas, 251, 389; attacked by *rākṣasas*, 248; descriptions of, 295; notion of, 38, 42, 92, 138–9; phases of, 146; as place of penance and purification, 250

*aśvamedha yajña*s, 10, 25, 57, 85, 128, 190

āṭavika (forest dwellers), 253–6

āṭavika-rājās (forest chiefs), 254

atithi (guest), 148–9

ātman, 52; association of *prāṇa* with, 30; definition of, 30; process of, 35. *See* also transmigration of soul, doctrine of

ātman–brahman relationship, 34, 267; concept of, 4, 17

Aurangzeb, Emperor, 272

age, 2

Babri Masjid–Ramjanmabhoomi movement, 283, 408

Bairāgi, religious order, 271

bali, 6, 7, 12, 26, 63n12

beef, consumption of, 9, 27; *go-ghna*, 27; prohibition on, 27; on special occasions, 27; Yajñavalkya, 244

bhāga, 7, 12

Bhāgavata Purāṇa, 391

Bhagvad-Gītā, 72, 157, 267, 274, 381, 400, 402–3

bhakti, 278; concept of, 171; movement, 95, 264, 267; process of, 113; sects, 72, 268, 279, 281; teachers, 375; teaching, importance of, 391

bhikkhus (monks), 73, 90, 109, 116, 119, 140, 147, 159, 173, 176, 191, 320, 330, 334

bhikkhu saṅgha, 162

bhiksu-sūtras, 153

Bindusāra, 197–8

Birsa Munda movement, 180

Black- and Red-Ware cultures, 62n1, 219

bodhisattva, 210; ideal of, 174, 199; Saddāprarudita, 336

Book of Daniel, 169

brahmacarya, 140, 147

brahma-kṣatra hierarchy, 8, 186, 256

brāhmaṇa(s), 2–3, 7, 16, 29, 40, 71, 76, 107, 115, 142, 159, 180, 266, 293, 316, 375, 404; claim to intellectual superiority, 385; competition for status with *kṣatriya*, 12; as *dāsyaḥ-putra*, 3, 386; doctrine of, 36; employment of, 266–7; Gauḍa and Sārasvata, 386; grants of land to, 248, 252; as intermediaries between *yajamāna* and the gods, 29; *kṣatriya's* dependence on, 8, 31; legitimacy of, 3; notion of, 33–4; relation with *śramaṇas*, 38; rituals performed by, 388; roles and functions of, 386; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 57; social superiority of, 266; status of, 298; as teachers, 3; *vidūṣaka*, 293

brāhmaṇa–śramaṇa contradiction, 281, 381

Brahmanism, 38, 72, 139, 264, 269, 313; Buddhist conflict with, 392; characteristic of, 266; and

conservatism, 271; differentiated from subsequent religious groups, 265; doctrine and ritual of, 386; institutions of, 390–1; *nāstika* doctrines, 190; and non-Brahmanic religion, 269; ritual of sacrifice, 339
Brāhmī script, 69; evolution of, 69
Brahmo Samaj, 264, 272, 274, 405
Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 36, 55, 145
Bṛhaspati, 191–2
Buddha, Gautama, 13, 17, 39, 47, 54, 278, 379–80, 383; as *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, 190, 199–200; and scenes of secular life, 345; teachings of, 177
Buddha Maitreya, 54, 95, 96, 169, 172, 174; cult of, 177, 178; and evolution of urban centres, 178; prophecy of, 177
Buddhism, 12, 23, 37, 45, 54, 61, 72, 98, 108, 159, 169, 170, 173, 189, 333, 380, 381; crypto-Buddhism, 194, 390; Dalit conversion to, 381; decline of, 139, 178, 190, 266, 338, 402; heterodox sects, 46, 52, 70, 185; Hīnayāna, 96, 330; historical mission of, 61; importance of, 381; Mahāyāna, 96, 330; monastic life, 245; patrons of, 40; politicisation of, 160; sectarian developments within, 91; Shramanic tradition of, 278; to Sri Lanka through Mahinda, 197; state patronage to, 382; Sthaviravāda sect, 39; Theravāda, 91, 96, 124, 160; Vajrayāna, 111, 113
Buddhist Councils, 39; First Council of Rājagṛha, 39; Third Council at Pāṭaliputra, 39
Buddhist *Jātaka* stories, 76, 93
Buddhist monasteries, 91, 129; patronage to, 338; rock monasteries, 336
Buddhist monks. See *bhikkhus* (monks)
Buddhists, 2, 5, 38; change and continuity, notion of, 61; heterodoxy, growth of, 37; persecution in Kashmir, 298–9; sense of community, 314; social code, 51
Buddhist *stūpas*, 71, 310, 336; destruction of, 299; donations for creation of, 313; importance of, 314; Sanchi *stūpa*, 314
Buddhist *vihāras*, 186

caitya cult, 31, 336
Cānakya, 197
caṇḍāla, 16, 49, 84, 95, 118
Candella kings of Bundelkhand, 367
Candravaṃśa (lunar) lineage, 47, 213, 293
Caraka, medical treatise of, 77
Cārvāka, 88
caste discrimination, 148, 381
caste identity, 90; social obligations and, 277
caste segregation, in daily living, 59
cattle raids, 9, 11, 41, 247
celibacy, rules of, 97, 117, 128, 147
Christianity, 54, 177, 262, 264, 305; colonial power, 272; conversion of Hindus to, 272–3; religious identity, 303; *See also* Judeo-Christians
Christian missionaries, 270, 272–3, 405
coins: copper, 48; silver, 48
Council of Pāṭalipūtra, 91
cultural tradition, in early India, 290–306; behaviour patterns, 291; caste and sect-based system, 304; categories of, 319; continuity of, 291; definition of, 291; meaning of, 290; and nuances of social dispositions,

306; *paramparā*, concept of, 291; Śaiva–Buddhist conflict, 199, 301; Śaiva–Jaina conflict, 199, 299–301; selection of, 321
Curzon, Lord, 347
cyclic time, Hindu notion of, 171

daityas, 189–92, 195, 252
Dalits, 286; conversion to Buddhism, 381
dāna, 26, 39, 90, 116, 310–11, 329–30
dāna-stutis, 9–10, 308, 318, 325–6
daṇḍa, 58, 85, 118, 161
dāsabhṛtaka, 49, 84, 95
Daśanāmi Saṃnyāsis, 112, 123
Dasaratha Jātaka, 67, 399
dāsas (slaves), 10, 47
dāsīputraḥ, 3, 292, 386
deva-asura confrontation, myth of, 190–1, 195
devadāsis, 316–17
devayāna (path of the gods), 15, 36
dhamma: concept of, 370; law of, 26, 40, 42
dharma ('the law'), 244, 279; Buddhist concept of, 157–8; notion of, 59, 93; practice of, 87; significance of, 270
dharmasūtras, 38, 51, 70, 120, 141, 148, 184–5, 193, 265–7, 269, 283, 336; of caste, 16; on position of women, 336; rules of, 16
dharmaśāstras, 76, 85, 140, 157, 184, 265–7, 269, 283, 292, 293, 311, 313, 318, 329, 336, 373
dhyāna (meditation), 30, 42, 86, 103–4, 107, 144, 295; *bodhisattva*, ideal of, 174; notion of, 174; powers of, 160
Digambara Jainas, 112
Dīgha Nikāya, 172, 177
dissent and protest, in early India, 134n72; caste rules, breaking of, 90; determination of degree of, 89; effectiveness of, 98; expression of, 83; forms of, 99; life-negating principle, 83; and negation of social obligations, 90; religious and philosophical sects, 83; social tensions and differences, 86; syntactical structure of, 82; when protesters become inheritors, 92; words for dissent and non-conformity, 81–2
doms, 49
Dvaitavana forest, 246
dvija code, rules of, 159

East India Company, 347
Enlightenment, 59, 349

Fa Hsien/Faxian, 177
Fazl, Abu'l, 280
Fifth Monarchy, 179–80
food taboos, 59, 90, 103
forest, destruction of: by Duḥṣanta hunting, 245; Khāṇḍava *vana* burnt by Agni, 245
forest hermitage, 67, 247–8; and encroachment into the forest, 248; origin of, 248; suggestion for, 248–9
forest lands, 242, 248, 258; appropriation of forest produce, 254; attacks on caravans, 253; claims over, 247; conservation of, 258; customary use of, 254; deforestation of, 253; disappearance of, 254; duality of settlement and, 251; dwellers of, 257; forest chiefs, 253–4; illegal clearing of, 254; images of, 251; as shelter for brigandage, 255

four *āśramas:* in Brahmanical tradition, 140; theory of, 87, 245; *vānaprastha*, 151–2

gahapatis, 37, 40, 42, 90, 127, 163
gaṇa-saṅghas, 17, 108, 144, 212, 382–3
gandharvas, 245, 247, 294
Ganga civilization, 46
Ganga river system, 41
gāthās, 184
ghoṣa-yātra, 246
gift exchange, 8, 11, 26, 28, 326, 393; sacrificial ritual and, 26
grāma, 242, 247
Great Tradition, 110, 397
gṛhapati, 10, 155
gṛhastha (householders), 38, 116–17, 121, 139–41, 244; food regulations, 154; initiation into, 153; lifetime of, 148; marriage and, 148, 153; and renunciation, 146; social function of, 116, 146, 157
gṛhastha-āśrama, 90, 111, 155
Gupta dynasty, 292, 338, 352, 381; grants of land, 255; support to Vaiṣṇava worship, 338
Guru Granth Sahib, 274
guru–śiṣya paramparā, 67–8, 77, 332

Hamzā-nāmā, 346
Harappa culture, 62n1; Paśupati seal of, 105; religion, 265; as substratum religion, 265
Harappa script, 69
Harivaṃśa, 186
Harṣa-carita (Bāna-bhaṭṭa), 257, 309, 326
Harṣavardhana, 309
Haṭhayoga, 113
hero stones, 143, 170
Hīnayāna Buddhism, 96
Hindu diaspora, 285; importance of, 285
Hinduism, 72, 105, 115, 170, 173, 262, 270, 314, 373, 402; animistic spirit cults, 269; anti-Muslim sentiments, 271; *bhakti* aspect of, 390; challenge from Christian missionaries, 273; characteristic of, 279; Christian missionaries and, 405; Daśanāmis–Bairāgis conflict, 278; deities of, 195; elements of, 405; folk Hinduism, 269; Harappan religion, 265; history of, 271; image-worship, 268; impact of Orientalism on, 273; on model of Christianity, 273; origin of, 263–5; pilgrimage, importance of, 279; propagation of, 263; proponents of, 270; Puranic, 185–6, 189, 195, 256, 339, 373, 385, 401; religious identity, 303; religious practice and belief, 373; sectarian identities, 303–4; Semiticization of, 405; social identity of, 269; substratum culture, rise of, 113; *See also* Brahmanism; Syndicated Hinduism
Hindu missionaries, 269–70
Hindu sects, 104–5, 118, 156, 158, 169, 255, 262–3, 271–3, 278, 293, 298, 301, 303, 314
Hindutva, ideology of, 405
History of Buddhism in India (Tāranātha), 124
House of Curiosities, 350
Hsüan Tsang/Xuanzang, 111–12, 177–8, 190, 249, 265, 298–9, 347

Ikṣvāku lineage, 188–9, 207, 211–12; characteristic of, 212–13
Ila/Iḷā, story of, 249
Indian Museum, establishment of, 348

Indo-Persian epics, 346
Indra, 106, 161, 170, 195, 275
Indus civilization, 46, 264
iron technology, 62n1, 108
Islam, 72, 95, 170, 262, 263, 305; coming of, 280; conversion of Hindus to, 272–3; indigenous converts to, 271; prophet, concept of, 173; religious identity, 303; Sunni–Shi‘a divide, 283
itihāsa-purāṇa, 184, 400

Jābāla Upaniṣad, 111
Jagannātha temple, Puri, 393–4
Jaina *munis*, 298
Jainism, 381, 385, 394; Digambara sect, 112, 299; Kānci *gaccha*, 110; monastic life, 245; patrons of, 40; persecution by Śaiva sects, 299; rise of, 48; royal patronage, 300; Sandeva *gaccha*, 110; sectarian developments within, 91; Shramanic tradition of, 278; survival of, 338; *svetāmbara*, 300; *tirthānkaras*, 172, 185
jajmani system, 317; meaning of, 327; of service relationships, 326
janapadas, 22, 48, 50, 57, 60, 84, 108, 210; naming of, 10
janas (tribes), 47
jāti, 47, 51, 75, 311, 401; stratification in the *kṣetra*, 255; transformation of *jana* to, 255
Jātipurāṇas, 401
Jina-śāsana, 198
Judeo-Christians, 72, 95, 169–70
Judgement Day, notion of, 170, 179

Kālidāsa, 249, 293–4, 339
Kalighat paintings, of Bengal, 346
Kalinga War, 382
Kaliyuga, 96, 171, 190, 193, 196, 200
Kalkin *avatāra*, 95, 169, 171, 175–6, 178, 200
Kalpasūtra, 124
karma: concept of, 2, 15, 16–17, 30, 36, 55, 61, 145, 269; ethical grounds of, 16
Kaṭha Upaniṣad, 30, 36
kāyastha, 71, 77
Khajuraho temples, 367
Khāṇḍava *vana*, burning of, 245–6
khattiyas of Buddhist literature, 47, 57
knowledge: *ātman*, 15; categories of, 5; methods of attaining, 4; sociology of, 64; theories of, 34, 74, 128; transmission of, 64, 68, 75
Kosambi, D.D., 376–7
Kṛṣṇa, 383–4
Kṛta-yuga, 171, 176
kṣatriya, 12, 17, 27, 29, 40, 42, 84, 143; as cattle-raiding warrior, 9; characteristics of, 27; clans, 47; competition for status with *brāhmaṇa*, 12; dependence on the *brāhmaṇa*, 8, 31; duty of, 157; *pariṣads* (assemblies) of, 3; political power, 7; role of, 5; as teachers, 3; of Vasiṣṭha *gotra*, 189
kṣetra, 242–3, 248, 258; *jāti* stratification in, 255
Kumbha Mela, 278
kutūhala-śālās, 73, 107, 243

Licchavis, 189, 210, 212
Liṇgāyats, 98
Lokāyata, doctrine of, 37, 41, 61, 88

madhya-deśa, 178, 190
Mahābhārata, 50, 66–7, 85, 93, 184, 199, 209, 245, 252, 269, 274, 293, 346, 382, 401, 402; epic heroes of, 165n3; *gandharvas* conflict

with Kurus, 247; Khāṇḍava *vana*, destruction of, 245; Kurukṣetra war, 383; in television serials, 284; Udyoga parvan, 383; Veda Vyāsa, 292
mahājana, 93–4
mahāśālā mahāśrotrīya, 32–3
māhāsammatta, 40, 50
Mahāsupina Jātaka, 176
Māhāvaṃsa, 124, 198, 385
Mahāvastu, 186
Mahāvīra, 13, 17
Mahāyāna Buddhism, 96, 330, 336
Mahmud of Ghazni, 304
Maitri Upaniṣad, 35
Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad, 87
Manichaeism, 54, 177
Maniya-devi, 367
marriage: exogamous, 292; Gandharva, 294; ritual, use of fire for, 148; as second *āśrama* of *gṛhastha*, 148
maskarin, 118
maskari parivrājaka, 153
maṭha, 92, 112, 121, 123–4, 160, 390; organization of, 391
mātsyānyāya, 50
Matsya Purāṇa, 191
Maṭṭavilāsa (Mahendravarman), 299
Maurya, Candragupta, 50, 197
Mauryan empire, 50, 198
Māyāmoha, 190–1, 195
megalithic burials, 14, 332; at Amaravati, 330
Megasthenes, 91, 118, 129, 152, 265, 268
Meghadūta (Kālidāsa), 339
millenarian movements, 95, 168, 173, 179–81; characteristic of, 175; requirement of, 172
mleccha (barbarians), 51, 269, 270, 276, 280, 281
mleccha-deśa (impure lands), 31
mokṣa (liberation from rebirth), 52, 67, 86, 141–2, 145, 279; attainment of, 120; concept of, 4, 15, 30; goal of, 295; pursuit of, 13
Mudrārākṣasa (Viśākhadatta), 197, 299
Muṇḍaka, 36
munis, 33, 106
museum: acquiring a collection, 363; aesthetic objects, display of, 371; *ajaib-ghar*, 350, 362; antiquities, collection of (*see* antiquities); artefacts in, 349; art-historical museum, 352; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 364; British Museum, 362; Buddhist sculptures, 351; concept of, 350, 362; Craft Museums, 345; depiction of the Buddha from Gandhara, 362–3; established by the government, 350; exhibition of icons of deities, 353; for formulation of a national history, 351; function of, 361, 370–1; future of, 371; Gandhara art, depiction of, 363; as heritage, 370; historical-dynastic labels, 363; and history, 344–58; House of Curiosities, 350; Indian Museum, establishment of, 348, 362; items of heritage, 367–8; Kalighat paintings of Bengal, 346; miniature paintings, 346; objects of art-historical value, 351; private collections, 350, 361; religious icons of deities, 350; representing cultural heritage of the nation, 351; sculptures, in stone and metal, 351; Treasure Trove Act (1889), 349; University Departments of History, 349; use of dynastic labels for antiquities, 351; *vastu sangrahalaya*, 362; Wonder House, 350
Muslim iconoclasts, 272

nagara, 70, 242
Nalanda, 314
nāstikas, 193, 266
Nātha cult, 120
Nāthapanthis cult, 271
Navalar, Arumuga, 273
Nirgranthas, 38
nirvāṇa, 13, 36, 39, 170–1, 177, 329–30
Northern Black Polished Ware, 218

Ochre-Colour Pottery culture, 62n1
oral and written traditions, in early Indian society: access to literacy, 71; apprenticeship to special professions, 75; Aśokan inscriptions, 69; audio-visual mechanism of communication, 79; Brāhmī script, 69; Buddhist institutions and organisation, 73; Caraka, medical treatise of, 77; centres of Sanskrit learning, 68; debate, patterns of, 74; decontextualisation, process of, 67; elements of, 64–5; guilds of craftsmen, formation of, 75; *guru–śiṣya paramparā*, 67–8; Harappa script, 69; *kutūhalaśālās*, 73; literate societies, 66; medicine, practice of, 77; methods of analysis, 74; Pāṇini's grammar, 69–70; professional use of literacy, 71; *śilpaśāstras*, 76; trade and literacy, association of, 70; *vaṁśāvalīs*, 71–2; Vedic hymns, 65
oṣadhi, 129

pabbajja/parivrājaka ceremony, 153
Padma Purāṇa, 194
Pādshah-nāmā, 346
Painted Gray-Ware Culture, 27, 62n1
pakhaṇḍa, 281
pañcalakṣana, 184–5
Pāṇini, 37, 69
Parāśara *ṛṣi*, 292
parivrājakas (wandering teachers), 17, 35, 38, 88, 106, 107, 121, 141, 155, 173
Pārśvanātha (Jaina *tīrthaṅkara*), 108
pāśaṇḍa, 91, 105, 185, 192
Pāśupata Sūtras, 111, 114
Patañjali, 129, 198, 266
pātimokkha, 26
patronage, 306–22, 393; act of, 324, 340; to Buddhist monasteries, 338; *carita* literature, 309, 326; community, 313–14, 324–41; concept of, 324; contributions in money or kind, 337; contributions to the building of *stūpas*, 337; cultural symbols, 307; definition of, 307; donations from queens, 312; economic activity, 336; economic structure of, 337; embedded, 325, 327; during financial crisis, 318; in forms of religious practice, 313–14; guild donations, 329; investments in guilds, 335; man-to-man patronage, 308; recipient of, 324; royal and aristocratic, 310–12, 314, 325, 335; social functions, 307; social roles of, 308; temple rituals, 318; by *yajamāna*, 325–6
Paumacariyam, 67, 186, 209, 214, 257, 297–8, 398
peasant revolts, in India, 180
pitṛyāna (path of the ancestors), 15, 36
Prabodha-candrodaya (Kṛṣṇa Miśra), 299
Prajnāpāramitā, 336
prāṇāyāma, practice of, 117, 129, 162
Prarthana Samaj, 272, 405
punarmṛtyu (the cycle of deaths), 17, 30
puṇya, concept of, 39, 56, 90

Purāṇa, 92, 120, 267, 292, 385; *Ādi Purāṇa*, 186; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 391; in Jaina tradition, 186; Jātipurāṇas, 401; *Matsya Purāṇa*, 191; *Padma Purāṇa*, 194; Puranic Hinduism, 185–6, 200, 256, 373, 401; recitations of, 186; royal patronage, 186; Śaiva *Purāṇas*, 186; sectarian competition, 194; Shramanic sects, 192; *Skanda Purāṇa*, 213; Vaiṣṇava *Purāṇas*, 186; on Vedic views on belief and ritual, 193; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 185, 190, 196, 400–1

purity–pollution dichotomy, 47, 51; association of biological birth with, 147

puruṣārtha, concept of, 138–9

rājā, 245; associated with the management of land, 27; concentration of power with, 9; *dāna*/gifts to priests, 9, 26; function of, 9; legitimization of, 39; patronage by, 325; political authority, legitimation of, 327; political protest against, 327; synonymity of a warrior with, 27; transformation into *mahārājās*, 10; as *yajamānas*, 34

rājasūya yajñas, 10, 25, 85

Rājataraṅginī (Kalhaṇa), 198, 298, 347

rākṣasas, 208, 245, 247, 252, 257

Ramakrishna Mission, 270, 272

Rāmānandī sect, 398

Rāmānuja, 316, 390, 392

Rāmāyaṇa, 66–7, 85, 274, 283, 297, 396–8; *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, 226; *agni-parīkṣā*, 214–15; *Anāmaka Jātaka*, 209, 211; Āraṇya-kāṇḍa, 208; Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, 67, 208–9, 214; Bāla-kāṇḍa, 207, 212; *Dasaratha Jātaka*, 67, 209–10, 215; descriptions of Ayodhyā, 218; descriptions of Lankā, 219–20; epic heroes of, 165n3; exile of Rāma and Sītā, 210; Hanumān, 207; Ikṣvāku lineage, 188–9, 207, 211, 212; Jaina Rāmāyaṇa of Vimalasūri, 67, 297; Jaina version of, 215; *Jātaka* stories, 209; *Jayaddisa Jātakas*, 209, 210; *kāvya* version of, 207; kidnapping of Sītā by Rāvaṇa, 208, 211, 215; kingdom of Kosala, 216; Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa, 208, 215–16; *kuśīlava*, 66; Kumbhakarṇa, 220; *Nalinikā Jātaka*, 209, 210; *Paumacariyam*, 67, 209, 214, 398; people of Ayodhyā, 217; *rākṣasas* of, 247; Rāma as *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, 207, 215; *Rāma-kathā*, 209, 213, 221–2, 397; Rāvaṇa, 207, 214–15, 219; reference in *Mahābhārata*, 213; and rise of Bhāgavatism, 214; *Sāma Jātaka*, 209; *Sambula Jātaka*, 209, 211; and spread of Vaiṣṇavism, 226; structure of, 207; Sugrīva-Vālin episode, 208; Sundara-kāṇḍa, 208; in television serials, 284; transformation from *kāvya* into a sacred text, 209, 214; Uttara-kāṇḍa, 207, 219; Vālmīki, 186, 206, 216, 298, 391, 397–9; *vānaras*, 206–7; variant versions of, 67; *Vessantara Jātaka*, 209, 210; weapons used in war, 220; Yuddha-kāṇḍa, 208

Rasaratnākara, 130

Rashtrapati Bhavan, 351

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), 270, 284

rebirth, cycle of, 17

reincarnation, idea of, 14, 16

religious conversion, 272–3, 381

religious identity, 282, 303, 319
renouncers, 390–1; Hindu social action, 156; power of, 161; relation with householder, 145; self-discipline, 173; symbols of, 87
renunciation, 140; act of, 295; appeal of, 143; ascetics, 103; in Brahmanical tradition, 157; food tabus, 103; institutionalizing of, 296; institution of, 389; life-negating principle, 102; life-style, 103; notion of, 13, 26, 37–8, 58, 90, 389; purposes of, 248; role of, 102; selection of sects, 105
Ṛg Veda, 2, 7, 9, 86, 105; *dāna-stutis* hymns of, 9–10, 308, 325–6; *puruṣasūkta* hymn of, 28
Roman trade, with India, 110, 339
ṛṣis, 33, 106
Ṛtusaṃhāra (Kālidāsa), 339

sacrificial rituals: *bali*, 6, 7, 12, 26; centrality of, 24, 28; consumption of wealth in, 11; discontinuance of, 12, 31; *ghī* and milk, use of, 27; as gift-exchange system, 26; *gṛhya* (domestic rituals), 6; historical context of, 9; honorific offerings, 24; involving death of a living being, 25; killing of animals in, 17; as means of claiming legitimacy, 8; as occasion for making prestations, 10; performance of, 248; *pravargya* sacrifices, 24; resources for, 8; royal sacrifices, 24; seasonal rituals, 24; and social activities of people, 24; *soma* sacrifices, 24; *śrauta* (traditional rituals), 6; *vedi*, 25; in Vedic texts, 24; of *yajña*, 265
Sahajiyā cult, 120
Śaiva–Buddhist conflict, 199, 301
Śaiva–Jaina conflict, 199, 299–301
Śaiva monasteries: establishment of, 123; major monastic nucleii, 123; rise of, 111; Śaṇkarācārya, 123
Śaiva *Purāṇas*, 186
Śaivism, 299, 302
Śākta sects, 268
Śakuntalā, story of, 245, 247, 251, 293–4
saṃnyāsa (asceticism), 52, 114, 140
Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣad, 107
saṃnyāsin, 103, 106, 114–17, 120, 147, 244, 296; authority of, 160; *daṇḍa* carried by, 161; political role of, 160
saṃsāra, concept of, 15, 30, 55, 145, 269
Samudragupta, 254, 308
sanātana dharma, 276
Śangam literature, 86
saṅgha, 28, 32, 39–40, 42, 56, 59–60, 73, 83, 90–1, 98, 127, 311, 319–20, 329; functioning of, 122; physical symbols of, 330; relation with political state, 165n5
Śaṇkarācārya, 123, 158, 164, 390; *maṭhas*, 280; *māyāvada* of, 194
Śaṅkaravijaya (Ānandagirī), 124
Sanskrit language, 71, 266–7; studies of Islam in, 280
Santhal rebellion, 180
Sarasvatī (deity), 77
Sarmanes, 91
Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 24, 57, 244
Satnami revolt, 180
Satyākama, story of, 3, 34
Semitic religions, 16, 173, 262–3, 265, 273–4, 282
seṭṭhigahapatis, 40, 48, 331, 334
seṭṭhis, 37, 53, 84
Shaiva Siddhanta Samaj, 264, 273
shamanism: characteristics of, 106; elements of, 29, 33, 106; practices of, 106

Shramanic: religion, 198, 266, 277, 282; teaching, 193–4; tradition, 278, 380–1, 389–90

Shramanism, 265–6

siddhis (magical powers), 107, 109, 129, 161

Siddhārtha, 189. *See also* Buddha, Gautama

Sikhism, 72

Sikhs, 274

Silk Route, 339, 364

śilpaśāstras, 76, 345

Simhachalam temple, Andhra Pradesh, 315

Sino-Indian trade, 339

Śiva, 195

Śiva temples, 300

Skanda Purāṇa, 213

slaves, 175; price of, 48; status of, 48

social stratification, 47, 48, 84–5, 219, 221

social taboos, 84, 118, 152, 173

society: moral decline of, 171; *varṇa* organization of, 193

soma: cult, 265; as hallucinogen, 106; sacrifices, 24, 33

Somanātha temple, 407–8

souls: after death, 36; idea of, 14; immortality of, 1; transmigration of, 1, 4, 17, 30, 55

śrāddha, ritual of, 16, 116, 154, 191

śramaṇa, 106, 142, 266, 296

śreṇī-dharma (the customary law of the guilds), 49, 75

state formation, process of, 72, 84

state, religion of, 375–6

sthāpati, 75–7, 314

stri-dhana, 313, 336

śūdras, 10, 11, 29, 40, 42, 49, 66, 76, 95, 120, 147, 190, 316, 385; *sacchūdra*, 49; *varṇa* status of, 48

Sufi *khānqah*, 92

Sūrya temple, 339

Sūryavaṃśa (solar) lineage, 47, 207, 293

Suśruta, medical treatise of, 77

sūtradhāra, 75–7, 314, 338, 386

Swaminarayan movement, 272–3

Syndicated Hinduism, 282–5; creation of, 285; emergence of, 286; as Hinduism of pre-modern times, 286; ideology of, 286

Tantricism, 242, 264, 268; association with Yoga, 113; cults, 114; *dehavāda* tradition, 130; fundamentals of, 113; ideas and practices, 111, 113, 115; practitioners of, 389; rules of morality, 128; as sectarian movement, 113; sexual practises of, 128; supernatural powers of, 388–90

tapas (austerity), 86, 103–4, 128, 144, 194, 295; magical heat, 106; powers of, 160

Theosophical Society, 272

Theravāda Buddhism, 96, 124, 160

time, cosmic cycle of, 171; inevitability of decline and, 176

transmigration of soul, doctrine of, 1, 4, 17, 30, 55, 107, 174

Turuṣka, 280, 305, 404

tyāga (renunciation), concept of, 6, 17, 38

untouchability: Dalits, 286; issue of, 49, 51, 84, 271, 286

untouchables, 47, 49, 51, 84, 159, 225, 269, 276, 318

Upaniṣads, 1, 12, 14, 17–18, 24, 33, 35, 52, 68, 86, 105, 141, 143, 145, 248, 267, 273, 385–6; appropriation of, 5;

  Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 55; composition of, 2; concepts of, 2; evolution of, 2; on ideologies of Vedic Brahmanism, 37; *iti rahasyam iti upaniṣad*, 4, 30; *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 30; *Maitri Upaniṣad*, 35; *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*, 87; on role of the *kṣatriyas*, 5; *Saṃnyāsa*, 107; teachers of, 6; and Vedic belief and ritual, 2–3; view of the soul after death, 36; watershed situation, 23; *Yoga Upaniṣad*, 107
upāsaka, 109, 126, 127

Vaikhānasa, 107, 141
Vaiṣṇava monastic orders, 114
Vaiṣṇavas–Śaivas confrontation, 193, 200
Vaiṣṇavism, 113, 171
vaiśyas, 29, 48
vājapeya yajñas, 10, 25, 85
Vajrayāna Buddhism, 111, 113
vaṃśānucarita, 185, 187, 201, 400
vaṃśāvalīs, 71–2; composition of, 72
vānaprastha, 140–1, 151–2; as transition from *gṛhastha* to *saṃnyāsa*, 152
varṇa-dharma, 142, 163
varṇāśramadharma, 92, 107, 120, 140, 157, 190, 196, 251, 297–8, 304
varṇa system, 11, 16, 28, 34; classification by, 47; food taboos, 59, 90; framework of, 84, 86; hierarchy of, 98; rules of, 51
Vedas, 87, 104, 267; divine revelation of, 191
Vedic Brahmanism, 57, 60, 373, 385; critiques of, 194; ideologies of, 37; social and ritual mores of, 192
Vedic corpus, 2, 5, 27, 243, 245, 373, 386
Vedic deities, worship of, 19n20, 218, 275
Vedic *dharma*, 189, 191–2, 201; criterion of correctness, 194
Vedic literature, 31, 45, 49, 62, 105–6, 237n105, 238
Vedic religion, 14, 52, 195, 265
Vedic ritual practice: gift exchange, 8; sharing of offerings, 8; types of, 8; *vasordhārā*, 27; *yajña*, 6
Vedic sacrifice: functions of, 7; of livestock, 8; mobilization of resources for, 8; rituals of, 4, 6
Vedic Sanskrit, 2, 70
vihāra, 389–90
Vikramāditya VI, 309, 394
Vikramānkadeva-carita (Bilhaṇa), 304, 309, 326, 394
Vimalasūri, 67, 214, 215, 231n42, 257, 297, 399
Viṣṇu, 195; Buddha *avatāra*, 190, 199–200; Kalkin *avatāra*, 95, 169, 171, 175–6, 200; protection against the *pāṣaṇḍas*, 193; Rāma *avatāra*, 207, 297; worship of, 214
Viṣṇu Narasiṃha, 316
Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 185, 190, 196, 400–1
Viśvakarma, 77

Wang, Hsuan Tse, 129
wealth: consumption in sacrificial rituals, 11; expending of, 12; notion of, 9
Western Ghats, 243

yajamāna, 6–8, 10, 11, 24–5, 105, 142, 153; embedded patronage, 325–6; *kṣatriya*, 29; *rājās* as, 34
yajñas, 6, 10, 24, 141, 144, 163; *aśvamedha*, 10; decline of, 160; performance of, 244; *rājasūya*, 10; and recitation of the *mantras*, 162;

sacrifice of animals during, 57, 244; for salvation, 144; *vājapeya*, 10
Yājnavalkya, 1
Yama (god of death), 36
Yavanas, 92, 333
yoga (bodily control), 30, 42, 86, 103, 111, 295; association of Tantricism with, 113; foundation of, 162; practice of, 117
Yogācāra doctrine, 191
Yogasūtra, 129
Yoga Upaniṣad, 107
yugas: Kaliyuga, 96, 171; Kṛta-yuga, 171, 176; *mahāyuga*, 171, 176

Zoroastrianism, 169–70; elements of, 177

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